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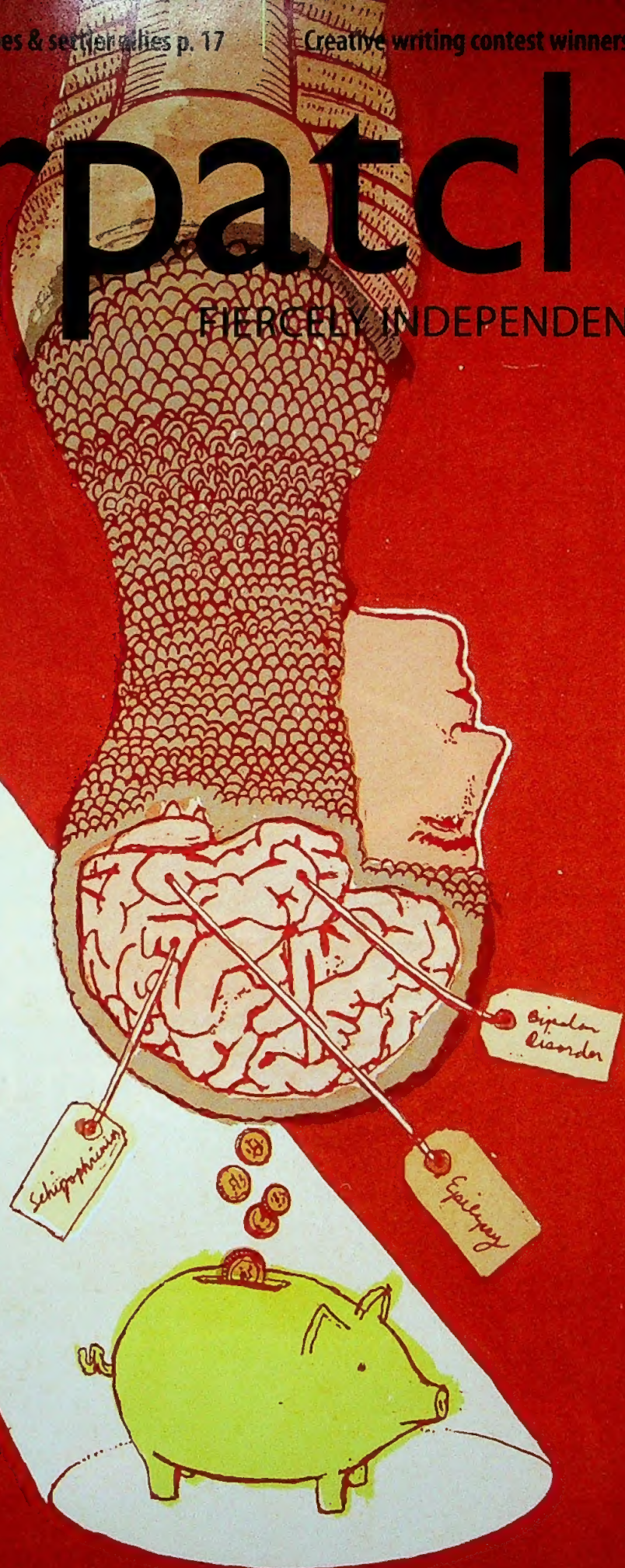
Creative writing contest winners!

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FIERCELY INDEPENDENT

When Psychiatry Burns

From Joan of Arc to ADHD



March/April Vol 43 No 2

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mongoloid

When my mother gave birth to her second child in 1974, hospital staff said he was *mongoloid*. English physician John Langdon Down coined the term in 1866, just before the British North America Act established the Dominion of Canada in 1867. In an era when steamships, railways, and telegraph lines carried the British empire to every horizon, and in which white supremacy was enshrined in “scientific” taxonomies of racial difference, Down had used the techniques of contemporary ethnography to measure and record the physical characteristics of people with the condition he named “Mongoloid idiocy.”

Up until the 1960s, most people like my brother were removed from “normal” society and regular schooling to die young in institutions (the Nazis employed involuntary euthanasia). My mother’s second son was not a mongoloid to me, of course, but *Patrick*, the older brother with whom I shared a bedroom for the first 12 years of my life. Patrick arrived late enough in the 20th century that he escaped social segregation, and the mongoloid handle never stuck. Each morning he rode a yellow bus to a special class, but that class was in a regular school with what we call normal kids.

Sharing a room and a bunk bed with my brother for over a decade sensitized me to things I couldn’t name. In the 1980s, Patrick embodied a different form of lower life than the mongoloid: the *retard*. I used to fantasize about punching kids in the face when they used the word. As I got older, and Patrick needed increased care as his congenital heart condition worsened, I had an intuitive sense that, to this society, if not its individuals, my brother was a form of human waste. Weak in body and “feeble” in mind, he was an economic suck, a drain rather than a tap.

Patrick died more than 10 years ago, but the world he left feels the same. “Retard” has been banished from use in polite company, along with “faggot,” “bitch,” and “cripple,” and for this we can be grateful. But perhaps these crude forms of othering have merely been eclipsed by more insidious references. A broad consensus on the necessity of fiscal restraint – and appeals to taxpayers and hard-working families – may not sound like an attack on anyone, but it sets the framework for an agenda that further punishes the marginalized. Where are the voices of the undocumented, the unemployed, the severely disabled, the dissident, or the dispossessed in middle-class cries for a fair share?

As communities across the country organize against cutbacks, privatization, and inequality, it’s worth considering how much has already been ceded. Recently, at the annual general meeting

of the city school board, Regina residents gathered to challenge the introduction of the public-private partnership (P3) model proposed for new school construction. In opposition to the board, progressive electors passed motions underlining the need for transparency and accountability from politicians and bureaucrats alike. Key to the opposition argument was an appeal to the bottom line: P3s are a ripoff for taxpayers.

Later in the meeting, a mother approached the microphone to speak about the inhumane conditions her disabled son endures at school. Her testimony brought one trustee to tears. It is, of course, fiscally prudent to make public schooling as lean as possible. The 1.5 education assistants allotted for this child’s school make more economic sense than hiring five or 10. In narrow budgetary terms, it’s not cost-effective to fund LGBT programming in schools, to build new social housing, to provide top-notch services to seniors, to maintain environmental monitoring stations and scientific libraries, to expand public transit, or to establish a national child care program. And there’s certainly no economic rationale for teaching about Canada’s history of genocide and ethnic cleansing or the lethal colonial dynamics of the oil and gas sector.

When we appeal to the logic of cost-effectiveness, I worry that our politics are not tied to a robust vision of human flourishing. We seem to have accepted the neoliberal framework in hopes of making tactical gains within it. The legacy of such pragmatism – this acceptance of the “common sense” of our day – is 30 years of mostly defensive struggles and a horizon of austerity for our children.

As we mobilize in our communities, it might be worth asking how the social forces that distinguish who is normal from who is not – the viable bodies from the abject – are rooted in a logic that sees economic productivity and balanced budgets as the apex of political achievement. In the absence of our own social vision, all we can do is react, using someone else’s terms of debate. We know what we are against, but what is it we are for?

ANDREW LOEWEN, EDITOR
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Announcement

In January, Briarpatch welcomed to the helm its new full-time Publisher, Rhiannon Ward. In addition to her wonderful name, Rhiannon brings a wealth of experience and fresh passion to the magazine. Reach her at rhiannon@briarpatchmagazine.com.

Lauren Simkin Berke is a Brooklyn-based artist and illustrator.

Paul Burrows is a Winnipeg-based writer, researcher, and parent. A lifelong activist, he co-founded the Winnipeg A-Zone (Emma Goldman Building) in 1995 and is currently finishing a PhD in history related to Treaty 1 Territory and settler-colonialism.

Caitlin Crawshaw is a freelance journalist and an MFA student of the University of British Columbia's optional-residency creative writing program. She lives in Edmonton with her partner, daughter, and their animal menagerie.

Lindsay Fisher is a Toronto-based visual artist, illustrator, and storyteller. She works with social justice groups and disability rights movements to create and support the development of inclusive and socially conscious graphic design.

Kelly Fritsch is co-editor of the forthcoming book *Keywords for Radicals* and a former editor of *Upping the Anti: A Journal of Theory and Action*. She is currently completing her PhD at York University.

Tom Keefer was a founding editor of *Upping the Anti* and is the general manager of the *Two Row Times*.

Megan Kinch is a community activist and a journalist with the Toronto Media Co-op and Basics Community News Service.

Matthew John Loewen listens for stories while tending to the gardens of Victoria's rich. Raised in the arid Okanagan Valley, he moved to Vancouver Island to complete a double major in environmental studies and political science.

Naomi Moyer is a visual artist and writer based in Toronto who often finds herself delving into perceptions of blackness and community within the African diaspora.

An immigrant who made Montreal home, **Baijayanta Mukhopadhyay** is currently a rural family doctor in northern Ontario and an organizer with the People's Health Movement.

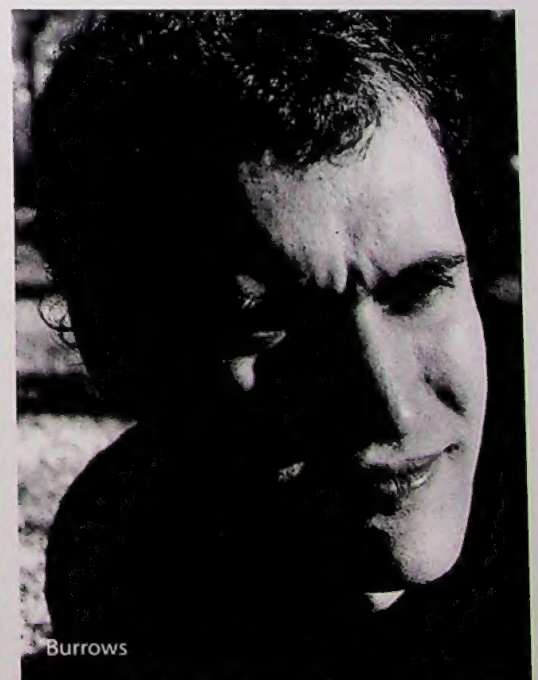
Shantala Robinson is a Vancouver-based illustrator who specializes in images for design, editorial, and publishing clients.

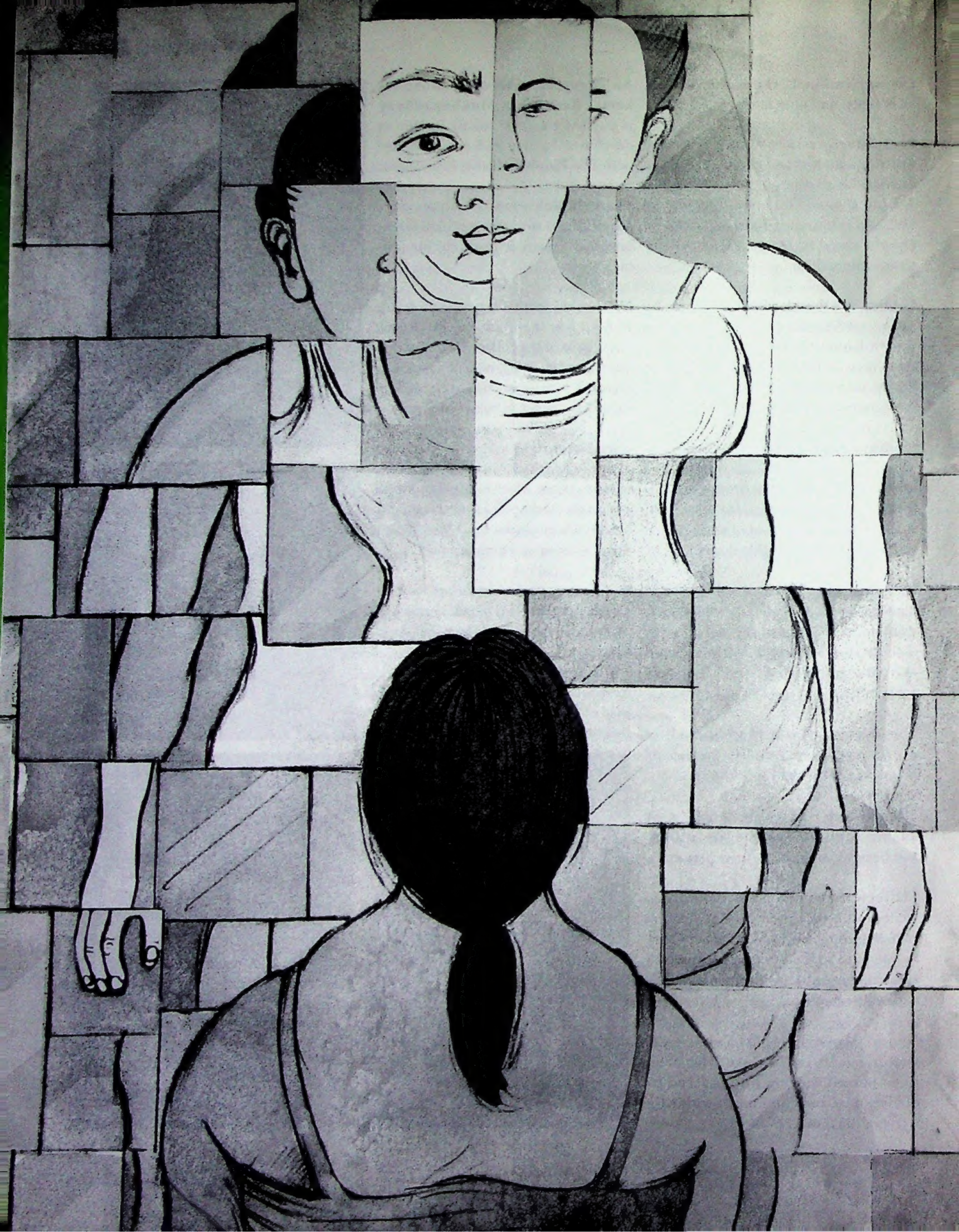
Nicole Shukin is an associate professor of English at the University of Victoria and author of the book *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times*. Her research focuses on the ways modern capitalism traffics in non-human life.

Kara Sievewright is a writer and artist currently living and working on the islands of Haida Gwaii, which have been claimed by Canada for the past 150 years but have been Haida territories for at least 13,000. She is working on a graphic novel.

Hailing from the Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation in the interior of B.C., **Tania Willard** is a designer, curator, and visual artist.

Xero became an activist when she realized that art is a capitalist venture run by (and for) elites.





The Other F-word

By Caitlin Crawshaw

Illustrations by Shantala Robinson

Bye-bye body

Twelve hours after surgery, I am on my feet again, shuffling to the bathroom in dirty feet. With one hand, I clutch the back of my blue hospital gown; with the other, I grip my IV stand. With each step, pain radiates from the six-inch gash just above my pubic bone. My guts are screaming bloody murder.

Nurse what's-her-face spots me as I take my first steps.

Shuffle, shuffle, stop. Inhale. Exhale.

"Just take it easy now," she cautions. Two nights ago, a surgeon sliced through layers of fat and muscle to extract the ailing baby trapped inside. Now I am hunched over like a 90-year-old with osteoporosis, unable to take more than two steps at a time.

We are at the bathroom door. The nurse gives me clear instructions: I am to pee into the plastic insert in the toilet, take a squeeze bottle and squirt warm water on my lady business, and change the three-inch thick maternity pad stuck to the crotch of hospital-issue granny panties. *Yes, ma'am.*

I pull the pocket door closed behind me, pull up my gown with swollen fingers, and sit on the tall toilet. As I relieve myself, I discover that even my bladder aches. *Ah, right. The catheter.*

Alone with my body, I decide to investigate. First, my legs: white, waxy tree trunks that hardly bend. I run my hands up my massive thighs and hips that roll off the edge of the toilet seat. Filled to bursting with IV fluids, the skin on my hips is taut; it feels like I've sausaged myself into pantyhose five sizes too small.

I sort myself out and shuffle to the sink. An invalid stares back from the mirror before me. Her face is round and jaundiced.

Purple moons hang beneath tired eyes. Her hair is greasy, with strands that cling to one another.

I rest my forearms on the counter, close my eyes. *Inhale ... exhale.* Now for the grand finale.

I pull up the gown, open my eyes slowly. What I see cannot be me: A pale belly droops like the jowls of a British parliamentarian. To look at my incision, I must actually *lift a flap* with both hands.

I let the gown fall.

Was that really me?

I take a deep breath and lift the gown again. I am still an enormous mound of pizza dough shoved into a diabetic compression sock. I actually laugh out loud – what else is there to do? I wasn't expecting sculpted abs, of course, but I was not expecting ... this.

The map of my old body made sense: a collarbone linking two distinct shoulders, a gentle curve between waist and hip, a round bottom emerging from strong thighs tapering to the knee bones, a soft belly providing a gentle path between sternum and pubic bone. Even my pregnant body made more sense. Even when my belly seemed impossibly large and strangers asked if I was carrying twins, I didn't feel too bad about my size: after all, I was *pregnant fat*.

Now, I'm just regular fat.

Mirror, mirror

I'm in love with the floor-length mirror at the end of the hallway. During the day, I like to stand before it and pose

with my hand on my hip. Smile demurely. Wave at my reflection. It would be narcissistic if it accurately represented me, which it does not. This is a reverse-funhouse mirror, making me look far less scary than usual. By some miracle of physics, it stretches me up a few inches, smoothing out the lumps and bumps.

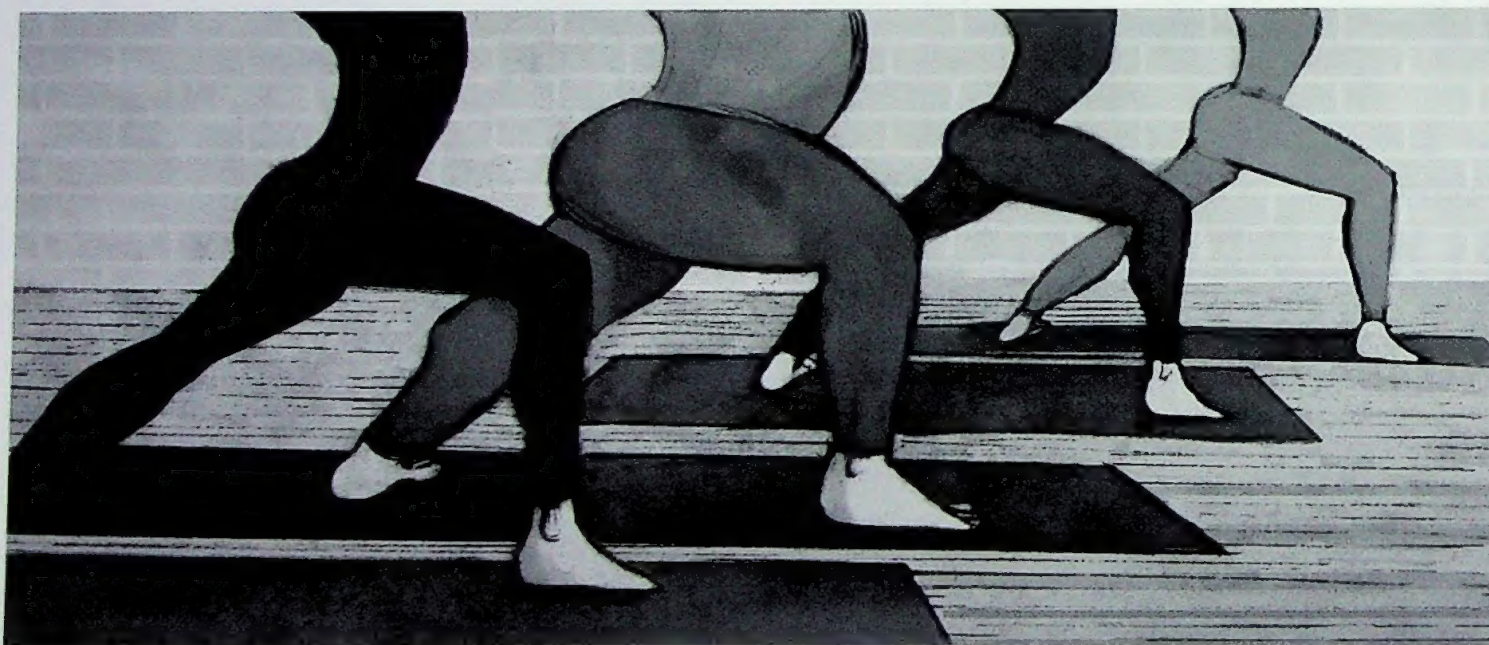
"Sure, I'm fat," I tell myself, as I twirl before it, "but it's a *pretty* kind of fat." I am trying on fat acceptance. I tell myself that I can be 205 pounds and five-foot-eight (okay, five-foot-seven-and-a-half) and still hot, still *me*. I need this mirror to convince myself that my old body is still hiding underneath this one. I need this visual lie in order to venture out into public during

**On paper, I'm a proud
feminist. Alone in
the change room,
I feel completely
defeated by my body.**

need to dress the body I have. After my partner Gail gets home from work one day, I head out for a spouse-sanctioned shopping spree. I hit up my usual haunts, and it doesn't go well. I break a sweat trying to yank shirts over my swollen breasts and burgeoning belly, and every pair of pants stops mid-thigh. It is now time to do the unthinkable.

I have never, ever, ever set foot in a plus-size store. And not because I've been too svelte. For years, I've purchased the biggest regular-size clothing, even if it meant a snug fit. I held onto the idea that I was a regular-sized woman. I used euphemisms

like "curvy" to describe my physique, eschewing more honest labels like "fat," "plus-size," or "chubby." On paper, I'm a proud



the first couple of months after the birth, because I still look six months pregnant.

Unfortunately, the mirror doesn't lie about my outfits. These threadbare Lululemon yoga pants should have been retired six years ago (and never worn in public, ever). The blue nursing shirt I wear day in and day out is pilling in the armpits and belly. I imagine myself in an episode of *What Not To Wear*, standing in that soul-crushing 360-degree mirror. "Nothing about this says 'Yummy Mummy,'" says Stacy London, off-camera. "Everything about this says, 'I've given up on life.'" Nodding, Clinton Kelly pipes up with a question: "Do you want your daughter thinking it's okay to raid the lost and found at the YMCA?"

Finally, a few weeks before a conference session I'm speaking at, I realize I can't keep waiting for my old body to reappear. I

feminist who believes that body size doesn't determine self-worth; alone in a change room, with pants stuck halfway up my legs, I feel completely defeated by my body.

Within moments of walking through the doors of Addition Elle, three different staff people – all shaped like apples, just like me – come up to say hello and talk about some sale happening. I'm not paying attention. I'm staring at the biggest hips, thighs, and rear ends I've seen in a long time. I'm well aware of the irony. *Stop it!* I chide myself. *You are shopping in a plus-size clothing store for a reason! These are your people.*

So I browse the racks. There's a weird amount of skinny jeans and other unflattering trends. But plenty of things are perfectly nice, so I grab as many as I can carry and head toward the change room. As I approach, a couple of women are folding the

change room rejects, chatting and laughing while they work. With a big smile, one lady turns to unlock a room for me. "Let me know if you need anything, honey," she calls from the other side of the door. *Everyone here is so bloody happy about being fat*, I think, bitterly.

The pants fit. The shirts fit. Everything looks pretty good, in fact. But I'm not sure whether this is a win or a loss. On one hand, I look much more pulled together, and Clinton and Stacy would definitely approve. On the other hand, this confirms it: I'm really and truly fat. Before I yanked my head out of the toilet in my early 20s, after a six-year eating disorder that made my life hell, this body was my worst fear. When I was living off of carrots and mustard and running until I saw stars, the thought of walking into a plus-size store and walking out with a pair of size 16 jeans would have given me heart palpitations. But, here I am.

Om my god

On an April afternoon, I finally wear my yoga pants for their intended purpose. The baby is still not sleeping through the night, so I swig three cups of coffee to keep myself vertical, hop in the car, and drive five minutes to the yoga studio. I am practically vibrating with glee (and caffeine).

I roll into the strip mall parking lot, grab my mat from the back seat, and waltz into the yoga studio. Just like old times. I am ready to soak up the prana ... and shed this fat suit.

Then I see them: the yoga bodies in (new) Lululemon yoga outfits. Triangular torsos. Tummies that look sucked in but aren't. Bums you could bounce a toonie off of. Muscular calves that taper at the ankles.

The blond woman at the front desk looks airbrushed, with glow-in-the-dark teeth. "Have you practised yoga before?" she asks. *Uh, yeah. I've practised yoga at this friggin' studio for longer than you've been legal.* Back in my day, I did headstands and back bends and one-legged balances – without breaking a sweat. Which, of course, is absolutely not the point of yoga.

I force myself to smile, act casual. "Oh, I used to come here *all the time*," I blurt. "I just had a baby and couldn't practise here during pregnancy because there wasn't a prenatal class, so I just kind of stopped doing it altogether. I should have kept going, but pregnancy is *so hard*, you know? But I'm excited to be getting back into it. It was, like, such an important part of my life. It's going to be great."

As each word exits my mouth, I think: *Just shut up. Shut up. Why are you still talking?* But somehow, my lips keep moving, completely disengaged from my brain. Of course, I'm not explaining my absence from yoga – I am explaining my fatness. What I am really saying is, "Don't worry – I'm not usually this fat!" As if I need to justify my body to this stranger who probably doesn't care. And if she does – if she's counting

calories and using fat ladies as thinspiration – that's sad. I'm not sure why the judgment of someone who hates herself should concern me.

I slip into the darkened studio, relieved to see that it's still free of mirrors. A single tea light on a ceramic plate burns at the front of the room. I find a spot where I can't jealously stare down the other yogis and unroll my mat. Then I sit, cross-legged, and try not to twitch.

Class begins and I move through the poses with my eyes closed. My hip flexors are tight and sore. I even hear my ankle *crick* as I balance on one leg in tree pose. These aren't the knees that once balanced against my forearms in crow. These aren't the arms that held a steady plank.

And this belly. It curls over the waistband of my pants and puts inches between my ribs and thighs during a forward fold. It is an unwieldy mass that makes even the gentlest twist cumbersome. It reminds me that my old body isn't hiding beneath this fat suit: it is gone forever.

But at the end of class, I can feel my core again. Between my sternum and belly button I feel a burn and realize what is happening: after being sliced open, the muscles and ligaments have sewn themselves back together. Beneath soft flesh, I am rebuilding, and no mirror could ever capture that. ⑥

**Everyone here is
so bloody happy
about being fat.**



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Joanne the maid,
child of god.

Saint Catherine and
Saint Margaret will
come to you, and you
must follow their
council.

Be a good
child and God
will help you

You must go
to succor the
King of France.



Your King will
be restored to his
kingdom, despite
his enemies. We
will lead you
to paradise.

"Joan was burnt without a hand lifted on her own side to save her. The comrades she had led to victory and the enemies she had disgraced and defeated, the French king she had crowned and the English king whose crown she had kicked into the Loire, were equally glad to be rid of her."

— George Bernard Shaw, Preface to Saint Joan

When Psychiatry Burns

From attention deficit hyperactivity disorder to major depression, psychiatric diagnosis is a booming business. From his unique vantage point as both a writer and a rural family doctor in northern Ontario, Baijayanta Mukhopadhyay takes a critical look at the power of modern psychiatry and the forces that shape it.

Illustrations by Lauren Simkin Berke

In France, Joan of Arc may be feted as a hero, but for many, the question remains whether she was simply mad. Psychiatric journals periodically publish theories about the arc of her narrative before retreating into silence once more. Was it tuberculosis in her temporal lobe? Epilepsy? Was she a highly functional schizophrenic? Or, to spite all attempts at diagnosis, was Joan instead a creative visionary destined to turn the tide in favour of the French in their Hundred Years War with the English?

Guided by the voices of saints only she could hear, Joan was convinced her mission was divine. From the remaining scraps of history, we get only tantalizing glimpses into her psyche. The few statements we have from her offer little guidance as to what was sincere, what was bravado, and what might simply have been deranged confusion. When asked at her trial why she refused to do the work expected of women in 15th-century France, she famously retorted, "There are plenty of *other* women to do it."

Railing against the normality her persecutors would hold over her head, Joan used her mission to liberate herself from society's expectations of a small peasant girl. Psychiatrists today may fault dopamine disequilibrium, but doing so denies Joan her passionate pursuit of freedom from the limitations of her circumstances, a personal quest on which she carried along an entire nation. The French celebrated her abnormality since it served a powerful political agenda. To allies of the English, however, this improbable warrior was a menace who so profoundly threatened their dominance she had to be put to death by fire. Three times, historians note, Joan's body was burned.

Six hundred years later, we no longer have to resort to fire. With an injection, we could silence the voices of Joan's guiding saints, training her neurons to suppress signals from the heavens and to process those from here on earth. Anyone who

experiences six months of auditory hallucinations and delusions of religious grandeur today, along with the concomitant social dysfunction that Joan's detractors claimed she displayed, would meet the criteria in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (known commonly as the DSM) for schizophrenia, an illness that distorts perception of reality. By diagnosing and medicating her deviance, we would vanquish with ease the threat she represented.

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association published the fifth iteration of the DSM, which has been the basis of psychiatric diagnosis since its inception in 1952. The manual is periodically reviewed and updated by a panel of experts, but concerns persist about its objective validity, its professed universality, and its attempt to pathologize entire ranges of the human experience that have previously been integrated into community life. Through its five editions, the number of conditions catalogued in the tome has only grown. This expanding scope may be the result of improved observation

Three times, historians note, Joan's body was burned.

and understanding, but like any endeavour that seeks to classify human beings, such a system allows those wielding its power to exert immense social control.

Even those involved in the development of the manual have concerns with its evolution. In response to the changes incorporated into the DSM-5, Allen Frances, who chaired the DSM-IV task force, expressed regret for his panel's work. "Inadvertently, I think we helped to trigger three false epidemics, one for autistic disorder ... another for the childhood diagnosis of bipolar disorder, and the third for the wild overdiagnosis of attention deficit disorder." In 2003, 7.8 per cent of American children had

been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In 2011, the figure had jumped to 11 per cent. Is one in 10 American children legitimately sick, or are they simply a variation of what is normal?

Debate rages. The clinical criteria for ADHD suggest it limits the functioning of children in at least two spheres of activity, such as in the home and at school, where it is most often noticed. Proponents argue that the condition has gone unrecognized, leading to generations of distressed children who could have

Is one in 10 children legitimately sick, or are they simply a variation of what is normal?

been treated. Those more critical of the diagnosis suggest it is used to subdue children into the docile obedience required by the education system and, eventually, the labour force. No one wants a classroom or a factory full of Joans of Arc.

Critics point further to the DSM's history as an instrument of social control. In 1957, the psychologist Evelyn Hooker stunned the field by demonstrating that gay men were no less psychologically well-adjusted than heterosexual men. In disrupting dogma, she forced experts to consider that any distress was therefore rooted in social factors, but homosexuality was not removed from the DSM until 1973. We may shake our heads now, but in 50 years, how will our treatment of people with ADHD, the other proverbial 10 per cent, be viewed when we rediscover how to engage with non-conformist learners?

A diagnosis for them all

A September afternoon. The emergency room hums with activity. The crisis worker leads me into a room where an adolescent, sporting a shaved head and wearing glasses and shapeless clothes, waits, staring at the floor.

Jim has been in and out of the hospital for months, battling depression and bouts of suicidality. His father is concerned that, now that Jim is back at school, he is being bullied for being transgender. The father seems supportive, if unable to drop his reference to Jim's birth sex. Jim remains monosyllabic.

It makes no difference when I ask the father to leave the room. Is it school, I ask? No. Is it bullying? Naw, my friends are cool. Do you feel safe at home? Silence. Are you sad? Don't know. Do you want to kill yourself? Shrug. Are your folks supportive? They're trying. Are you taking meds? Yes. Are you seeing the specialist down south? Yes. Did you feel any better when you last left the hospital? No.

The entire time, Jim's eyes do not leave his feet.

I stop, feeling stuck between exasperation and despair. What have we learned in the 50 years since Hooker's groundbreaking

work? Thirteen years old, a trans Aboriginal kid, trapped in a rough northern mining town. Clinical medicine only gives me so many tools to find him a way out. Hospitalization is temporary shelter with no guarantee of safety. No medication treats a racist, patriarchal world.

The process of psychiatric diagnosis is supposed to incorporate the social factors that influence a disease's course. Jim might have gender dysphoria and even associated depression, but other than noting the impact that isolation and ignorance have on his condition, there is little physicians can offer to cure those ills. In the run-up to the publication of the fifth edition, the British Psychological Society restated long-standing critiques of the DSM. Its statement insisted that

mental distress needs to be viewed "starting with recognition of the overwhelming evidence that it is on a spectrum with 'normal' experience, and that psychosocial factors such as poverty, unemployment, and trauma are the most strongly evidenced causal factors."

Prisons provide an interesting case study for this contention. Jails worldwide house a significantly higher proportion of people with psychiatric diagnoses than the general population. In Canada, the ratio is in the range of five times. While we know people who experience social stressors – such as extreme poverty and colonial oppression – are more likely to end up in the corrections system, the causal link with mental illness is less evident. Is it an independent factor for incarceration, or do social stressors contribute to mental distress, which leads to entanglement with the judicial system? We know that prison itself aggravates psychiatric conditions. The DSM might depict a world populated by sick people, but what if it is instead the world that is sickening for many who live in it?

The paradigm of psychiatry atomizes the experience of distress, making it an individual issue for which the collective bears no responsibility. Through diagnosis, we devolve responsibility for dysfunction onto the patient rather than holding accountable the structures that make people feel sad or crazy. Jim's depression is only one example. There are immigrant parents driven to suicidality, unable to keep up with the rent, women who hear voices saying they are the root of all evil in the world, young veterans who lash out in rage at the slightest sound reminiscent of the battlefield. The DSM provides a diagnosis for them all. But does it lead us to a cure?

Permission to grow old

Tom is a retired mining geologist, widowed 10 years ago. For eight months, he has been to the clinic with distressing regularity, concerned about his blood pressure. I have learned that repeat visits mean that someone is not asking

the right question, that the problem stated is not really the problem at all. Tom's blood pressure is probably the least of his worries.

I am new at the clinic, so I have the luxury of professed ignorance. I ask questions, probing fears, picking at worries, poking at despair. When Tom begins to cry about his dog who died, I realize I can stop. His son, who has been towering over his stooped but dignified elderly father, hisses, "Dad, it's been two years!" But what do two years mean when the loss of his dog spelled the end of their rambling walks together, another sign that all the moorings to which he once attached his life are gone and that he too will soon be helplessly adrift? A spike in blood pressure makes him think he is about to have a stroke, which fills him with dread at his looming dependency.

I hesitate as Tom wipes his tears. In my mental checklist, he meets the DSM criteria for depression. But is it so much depression as it is the human condition? Do I offer medication when poets and philosophers have addressed his fears with as much – or perhaps as little – success as physicians?

Using the DSM to identify illness is only useful if there is an intervention to offer. In isolating a condition for treatment, we also silence the uncomfortable questions the condition asks us. The rise of psychoactive pharmacology has profoundly shaped

I've learned that repeat visits to the clinic mean that someone is not asking the right question, that the problem stated is not really the problem at all.

our approach to mental health: it has been the root cause of a more comfortable, reductionist, biochemical approach to the human psyche. But the introduction of a profit motive – the ability to sell a cure for abnormality – has shaped it even more. When members of the DSM-5 panel were initially asked to sign a nondisclosure agreement, there was vociferous opposition to this confidentiality clause, rooted in concerns about conflicts of interest.

Robert Spitzer, who led the development of the DSM-III, said: "Transparency is necessary if the document is to have credibility, and, in time, you're going to have people complaining all over the place that they didn't have the opportunity to challenge anything." When nondisclosure was finally revoked, two-thirds of the DSM-5 panel declared direct ties to the pharmaceutical industry, a significantly higher proportion than previous DSM panels.

The DSM-5 panel's expansion of diagnostic criteria means that one in 20 menstruating women now meet the criteria of a



psychiatric disorder. Mood changes during the luteal phase of the cycle that have existed for millennia are suddenly a mental illness worthy of pharmacological treatment. The diagnosis of anxiety used to require that patients themselves recognize that a debilitating worry was in fact irrational. The DSM-5 abolishes this requirement for self-awareness, allowing clinicians to decide whether someone's fear is truly warranted or not. The expanded scope has even encroached on bereavement, where the two-month grace period to mourn in the DSM-IV has been collapsed to two weeks before physicians can diagnose depression and thus prescribe antidepressants (a \$10-billion industry in the United States alone).

Though universal, grief manifests itself in profoundly personal ways. Tom was not simply mourning his dog, but mourning a life well-lived, struggling to come to terms with

mortality. Although the DSM dictated to me that he was ill, I could not bring myself to suggest that he pay for medical permission to grow old. "Maybe you can come back next week and we can chat some more ... without your son," I tell him instead. He looks at me and nods, even smiling through his tears.

Social demons

For some, psychiatric diagnosis has been liberatory. The biological framework and the categories that arise from it have given people ways to understand their alienation, to understand why their reality jars with that of others. It

lives. But people are not simply their biology, and biological determinism has its limits. We refuse to believe people can be explained simply by their sexual hormones, so what of their neurotransmitters? We contest the medicalization of birth, at hospitals instead of home, by procedure instead of patience. Why then push sadness or spirituality into the domain of medicine as well?

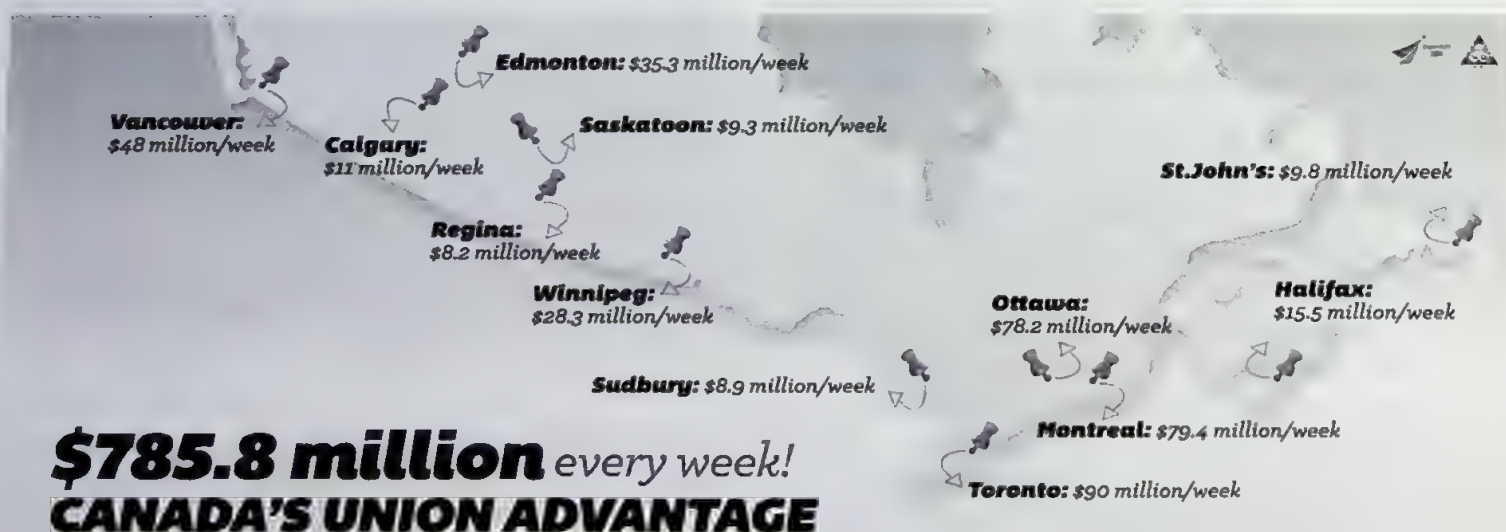
In medieval France, when alternate realities became inconvenient, they used fire. Today, perhaps thankfully, I reach for my prescription pad. But as a physician who has wavering faith in the potions I push, I struggle with the discipline of psychiatry. My colleagues approach their patients with the best inten-

tions. But our contemporary paradigm emerges from a particular economic and political context, buttressed by powerful interests for control and profit.

Two-thirds of the DSM-5 panel were forced to declare their direct ties to the pharmaceutical industry.

has defused moralizing about those with addictions, and it has encouraged us to think about the diversity of ways in which people may interact with their social and emotional environments. Diagnosis has meant access to resources that were otherwise denied to some people. Pharmacological treatment, especially if embedded in regimens that include social and psychological support, has transformed many

A society celebrates or suppresses parts of the human psyche according to the demands of its own demons. Madness is shaped by patterns of power and poverty. We act now with the utmost faith that we have science and morality on our side, appalled at the way those who deviate from the norm have been treated by the barbarisms of the past. But who is to say that when we are studied from afar we shall not be similarly judged? **b**



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A short introduction to the Two Row Wampum

By Tom Keefer

The Two Row Wampum is one of the oldest treaty relationships between the Onkwehonweh (original people) of Turtle Island (North America) and European immigrants. The treaty was made in 1613 between the Dutch and the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) as Dutch traders and settlers moved up the Hudson

**The two rows symbolize
two paths or two
vessels travelling
down the same river.**

River into Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) territory. The Dutch initially proposed a patriarchal relationship with themselves as fathers and the Haudenosaunee people as children. According to Kanien'kehá:ka historian Ray Fadden, the Haudenosaunee rejected this notion and instead proposed:

"We will not be like Father and Son, but like Brothers. [Our treaties] symbolize

two paths or two vessels, travelling down the same river together. One, a birchbark canoe, will be for the Indian People, their laws, their customs, and their ways. The other, a ship, will be for the white people and their laws, their customs, and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither of us will make compulsory laws nor interfere in the internal affairs of the other. Neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel."

Well aware of the political and military strength of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (which included the Kanien'kehá:ka), the Dutch agreed with the principles of the Two Row. As was their custom for recording events of significance, the Haudenosaunee created a wampum belt out of purple and white quahog shells to commemorate the agreement. John Borrows, an Indigenous legal scholar and the author of *Canada's Indigenous Constitution*, describes the physical nature of the Two Row Wampum

as follows:

"The belt consists of two rows of purple wampum beads on a white background. Three rows of white beads symbolizing peace, friendship, and respect separate the two purple rows. The two purple rows symbolize two paths or two vessels travelling down the same river. One row symbolizes the Haudenosaunee people with their law and customs, while the other row symbolizes European laws and customs. As nations move together side-by-side on the River of Life, they are to avoid overlapping or interfering with one another."

The Two Row Wampum treaty made with the Dutch became the basis for all future Haudenosaunee relationships with European powers. The principles of the Two Row were consistently restated by Haudenosaunee spokespeople and were extended to relationships with the French, British, and Americans under the framework of the Silver Covenant Chain agreements. It was understood by the Haudenosaunee that the Two Row

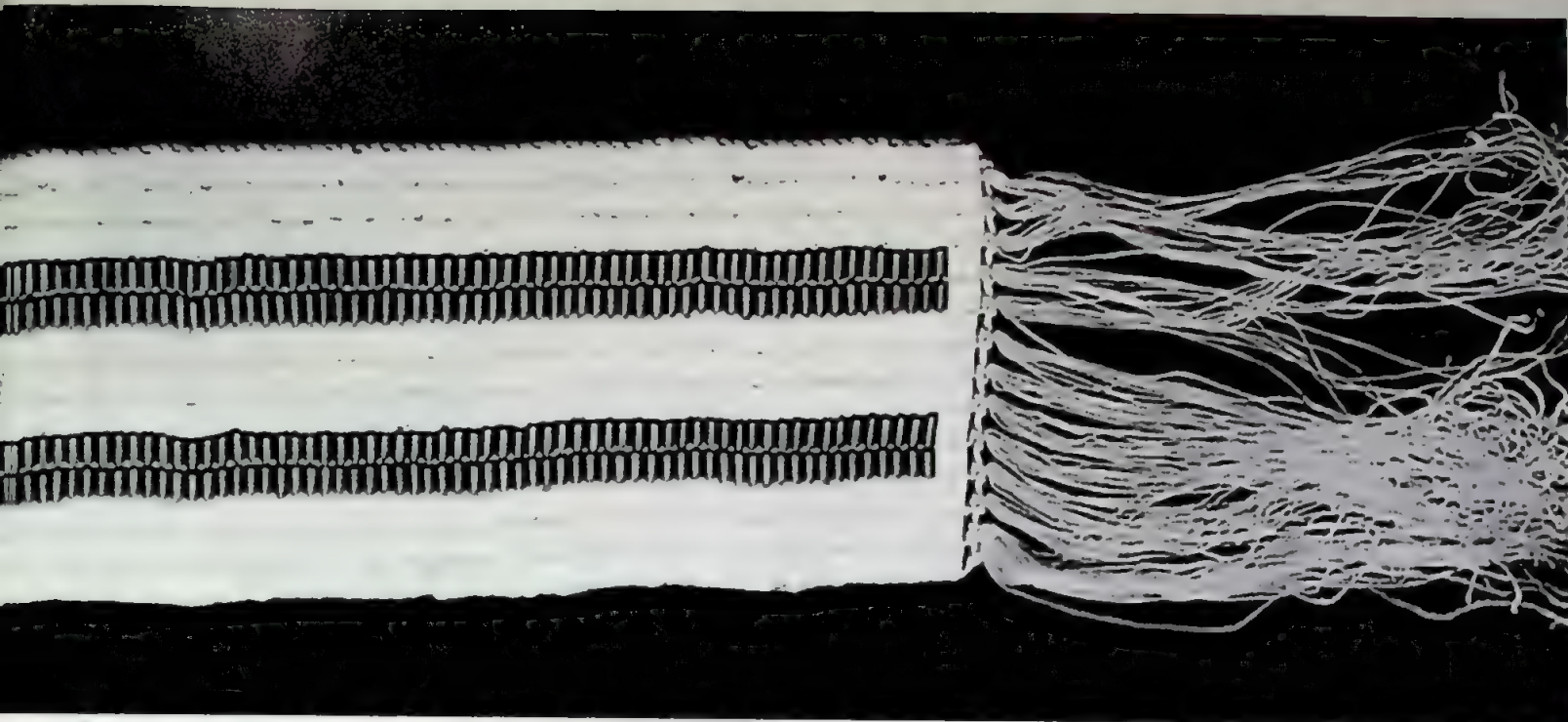


Photo: Nanai

agreement would last forever, that is, “as long as the grass is green, as long as the water flows downhill, and as long as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.”

While 2013 marked the 400th anniversary of the introduction of the Two Row to Europeans, it is important to note that the concept of the Two Row, based on reciprocal relationships of peace, friendship, and respect, has a much deeper meaning to the Haudenosaunee.

The Two Row is a foundational philosophical principle, a universal relationship of non-domination, balance, and harmony between different forces. The Two Row principles of peace, respect, and friendship can exist within any relationship between autonomous beings working in concert. These include nation-to-nation relationships, dynamics between lovers and partners, and the relationship between human beings and our environment.

While the Two Row Wampum was created to commemorate the introduction of the Dutch to the continent and is derived from Haudenosaunee traditions and philosophy, it is also consistent with the outlooks of many other Indigenous peoples seeking to accommodate themselves to the sudden arrival of Europeans on Turtle

Island. Almost universally, Indigenous peoples extended their hands in peace and friendship to the settlers on their lands and sought to improve their lives through trade and exchange with the newcomers. But at the same time, Indigenous peoples were intent on maintaining their own ways of life.

The Two Row can function as a framework for decolonization right across Turtle Island, since holding true to the Two Row means supporting the right of Onkwehonweh people to maintain themselves on their own land bases according to their own systems of self-governance, organization, and economics. (Rather than being driven by profitability and production for markets, most traditional Indigenous economies were based upon localized subsistence.)

In this framework people do not own land but belong to the land as a part of creation and they safeguard it on behalf of coming generations. Before European contact, resources and wealth were shared in most Indigenous societies, and production was geared toward meeting human needs rather than the manufacture of commodities to be bought and sold on the market.

The Two Row Wampum remains a treaty relationship that Haudenosaunee and other

Indigenous nations defend today, even if the Canadian state has failed to uphold the principles of the treaties it inherited from the British Crown. We should not

**“Neither of us will make
compulsory laws nor
interfere in the internal
affairs of the other nation.”**

be surprised that the British Crown and the colonial Canadian state have been unwilling to respect the self-determination of Indigenous peoples or to uphold the Two Row Wampum. Still, non-Indigenous people can learn this history and inform others about the original framework based on genuine peace, respect, and friendship with Indigenous peoples.

With the rise of a new cycle of Indigenous struggles, and with the global crisis of capitalism intensifying, the recent 400th anniversary of the Two Row Wampum is a good moment for us to start redefining the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. 6

Article abridged from the Two Row Times.



Hijacked canoes and settler ships

Indigenous activists discuss environmentalism and settler allies

The Oshkimaadziig Unity Camp is a land occupation and cultural revitalization project being carried out by the Anishinabek Confederacy To Invoke Our Nationhood (ACTION). Located in what is now Awenda Provincial Park, two hours north of Toronto, the project is a reclamation of Council Rock, one of six traditional embassies established in intertribal treaties between the Anishinaabek (Ojibwa) and Haudenosaunee (Iroquois). The following conversation developed around a fire as camp participants Giibwanisi, Kaikaikon, and Sleeping Grizzly discussed questions emailed to them by journalist Megan Kinch.

Mainstream environmentalism has been sidetracked into greenwashing, environmental capitalism, and tokenistic gestures. When even David Suzuki is writing essays about the failure of environmentalism, we know that something has gone wrong.

People affiliated with environmental justice movements in Canada have been trying to put solidarity with Indigenous peoples at the forefront, but these efforts haven't gathered the kind of support that mainstream environmentalism used to enjoy, nor has the meaning of solidarity been well defined.

Do you see your struggle as relating to environmentalism? Is there an environmental movement that you feel could support struggles like yours? Or does a new movement have to be built from the ground up?

Kaikaikon: If you want to call our struggle "environmentalism," yes, sure. But at the same time, we are much more than that. It's a spiritual struggle. It's a political struggle. [Our struggle is] a different kind. We have a way of life: it's environmentalism, it's spiritualism, it's matriarchy. Environmentalism is just

one aspect of it. We are so much more.

Giibwanisi: To answer that question, I think you have to look at the medicine wheel. You have to look at the physical, the emotional, the mental, the spiritual; the land, the air, the fire, the water. It is all one, one and the same. We cannot look at just one aspect.

Kaikaikon: It's not under one genre or ideology of struggle or fight. You can't categorize our fight as an Anishinaabek liberation movement and resistance. Even in the Anishinaabek Indigenous resistance movement where there's our people who have security culture and, I guess, warriorism, for lack of a better word, what we're doing is trying to achieve every aspect of who we once were and trying to bridge the gap with living in this society, with the technology of everybody who is in that medicine wheel.

When you go back and classify our individual struggle as environmentalism, then we've got to say no. People have their own definition of environmentalism. Greenpeace has their own view of environmentalism, and they are against seal hunts, which is people's traditional diet and right to feed themselves from the land. There are some things our allies may not agree with,

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GIIBWANISI is a member of the Bear Clan of the Anishinaabek Nation and a co-founder of the Oshkimaadziig Unity Camp and ACTION (Anishinabek Confederacy To Invoke Our Nationhood).

KAIKAIKON is a member of the Loon Clan of the Anishinaabek Nation and a co-founder of the Oshkimaadziig Unity Camp and ACTION.

SLEEPING GRIZZLY is a member of the Bear Clan of the Anishinaabek Nation and a co-founder of the Oshkimaadziig Unity Camp.

like hunting and trapping. And that's not, in their eyes, environmentalism [laughs].

Sleeping Grizzly: It is not really environmentalism. It's more of us living



Flags at the Oshkimaadziig Unity Camp

with the land, with what the land provides. But don't take from the land more than you need. When you take from the land, you have to make sure that what you're taking – like when we want firewood or we want to build a box or a canoe or something – we're going to take from the dead. We'll only take from the living when we need to build something with structure, something that can dry over time and provide a lot of strength, something we can manipulate to the way that we need, but not take more than we need.

Giibwanisi: I have not seen an environmental movement that could support struggles like us because, as we said before, there are so many different genres of environmental activism whether it's fracking or tarsands or pipeline or nuclear or "save the water" or "save the trees" or "save the air." There is not a single organization that I have seen that encompasses it all.

So if you want to consider Anishinaabekism or Haudenosaunee-ism who stands against all of these things, I

don't know. I have not seen it. Idle No More seems to be about the water and some of Bill C-38 and Bill C-45, but at the same time, they have their own view of liberation. And they're very exclusive. So a lot of the times, we were not included in their liberation agenda because at one time they were adamantly and vehemently opposed to blockades and land reclamations, and they distanced themselves from them.

Kaikaikon: Look at the different camps, like the Unist'ot'en camp [in B.C.] and all these similar actions, who are living off the land. Under the definition of what an environmentalist is, I'm not too sure if it is or is not [laughs].

Giibwanisi: Yeah, I think I'd have to agree with the Unist'ot'en.

Kaikaikon: Because, first, under our teachings, it says we have to concentrate on the South, the family, community, nation, the people of our Turtle Island, our continent. Then we start making alliances with these other folks. And I think our ideas and teachings can

really benefit this person who's asking these questions. But they could learn a lot from our people if they have some humility because our people have been observing for thousands of years and survived. We're still surviving. They can just observe from the people who've been here first and lived through a lot. There's been a lot of environmental disruptions, and we're still here surviving.

Your occupation at Oshkimaadziig Unity Camp is on the site of a Council Fire. It's been an ongoing debate on the left as to how different peoples should relate to each other in struggle. Some would argue that everyone should be in the same organizations and struggle on a class basis, others that nationally oppressed peoples need their own separate organizations which should relate to others.

Today there is also the theory that settler organizers need to take direction from Native organizers, but this is more useful as a guideline for settlers

participating in Native struggles rather than as a directive for social movements as a whole. What do you think should be the organizing relationships between Native and non-Native people?

Kaikaikon: In my own opinion, what we're trying to achieve here is we're trying to create a confederacy. We're trying to rebuild our confederacy. We had alliances with other Indigenous nations, like the Haudenosaunee and the Cree and the Wendat, so we're trying to build our own, reassert our own laws, our trade alliances, and through that came

and re-establish something new [with] the other people who are oppressed from all over the world but something that is more representative of the minorities and the oppressed people. And when the question is asked about non-Native people, you have to ask: which non-Native people? I think we have to have an equal relationship, but it has to be with people of struggle who come from other nations. And they have to maybe start a new government.

Giibwanisi: So what should be the organizing relationship?

Kaikaikon: Until that happens, all

Giibwanisi: Going back to the Two Row Wampum, it says that we're not supposed to steer each other's boats. But the way that I perceive things is that the canoes have

There are things our allies may not agree with, like hunting and trapping.

been hijacked and are actually aboard the settler ship. And we are basically trying to live our canoe way of life on top of that settler ship. So saying that I'm not supposed to steer the settler ship, well, you know what, my fucking canoe is sitting in that fucking settler ship. So national liberation for Native people and organizing is like saying, you know what, I don't want to tell you how to run your own fucking ship, but your ship and the people that run it, the captains, they are not listening to the workers or to whomever, the deckhands and whatnot. So I guess the way to answer that question is, if you are not actively trying to overthrow the captain, then I think that maybe it's time that we are in a position to say, you know what, in order to save humanity, to save ourselves, save Turtle Island – because the original agreements have been so intertwined and entangled – I think at times that Native people do have to be in a position to tell non-Native people what to do.

Kaikaikon: We were just talking about this last night. And I was thinking about this all day, how to write this, because it's been on my mind for a while, because it needs to be said without hurting people's feelings, because it needs to be said and it needs to be brought out amongst our brothers and sisters out there who are working with these activists in the different organizations. We've been colonized for so long that some of us, even on the front-line struggles and even back at home in our communities, have developed a kind of syndrome where we have all these fears and intimidations and feelings of inferiority to white people. This is something internal that we're dealing with. So when we're working with these people, there's little, subtle ways in how



the Two Row Wampum. And the settler society, we have an agreement with them that we're trying to uphold here.

I don't want to sound racist [laughs]. I have to be careful about how I answer this. But our nations have been dealing with

The fundamental principle is the relationship, from an Indigenous perspective.

Eurocentric people for too damn long. It comes to a point [where] we need to drop out of these treaties, and even the 1764 Treaty of Niagara Covenant Chain belt,

lands come back to us! [laughs] We can establish zones like their cities and shit where they can remain but we're still the landlords. This is kind of radical, but those people, they need to overthrow their friggin' governments. But we need to work with these people out there to overthrow the governments and the police and the military – which is a damn hard thing to do, but we need to do that – and re-establish our governance, our agreements, our relationships. And that I believe is true for the other minorities who come here. They don't even know the relationship that exists, and I think we'd find common ground to unite.

they come and “help” that they make our people feel inferior.

Me, I feel like we’re dependent on their help. So no matter how they’re trying to help, it’s funny, but they’re still the colonists. The white people are the colonists. Because they’re helping to decolonize, but that word “colonize” is still in there. They are decolonizing, so they’re still the Indian agents running around trying to do what’s best for Indians. Because they’re the ones who think they know it all, so they’re helping us. Even by answering these questions, we use the English language and their ideology – we’re using everything that’s theirs. Even their Marxism. Somewhere there’s our own war chiefs and our own ideas that we should be using to answer these questions. We’re still finding out ourselves, but we need to utilize other people’s ... the revolutionary schools of thought, I guess. Marxism?

Do you think that Indigenous agreements such as the Dish With One Spoon and the Two Row Wampum are relevant here? Do they apply to the state, or do they apply to peoples including western revolutionaries?

Kaikaikon: What we’re trying to accomplish here is to rebuild ourselves and rebuild our alliances with other Indigenous nations. Our responsibility is to our people first and to our communities and our families. So it applies to the state and it applies to them. Because what you said, we can’t answer that. It’s up to them. It’s up to these newcomers to settle that and fight amongst themselves on that. Because we have our own fight to do trying to be with our people who are trying to speak and represent us, who are

**You know what, my
fucking canoe is sitting
in that settler ship.**

going against these original agreements. So we’re trying to liberate ourselves from what they’re doing to us, what our chief and [band] council and these peoples are doing. We’re trying to liberate ourselves, so we have to work together with our

common allies to remove this shit in our own communities. So it is relevant.

Giibwanisi: Personally, I think that the Two Row, the two relationships between settlers and Native people that is the Two Row, is relevant because of the entire context, its fundamental principles. And the fundamental principle is the relationship, from an Indigenous perspective, with the Two Row Wampum and with everything, with the creator, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, the wingeds, the crawleds, the ones that go in the water. And I think that, yeah, the founding principles of the



Two Row Wampum, we could use those things. But at the same time, the Two Row Wampum was never entered into with the one good mind from the settlers’ point of view. They did not use their one good mind to make this relationship. I think it can be applied if people come with that one good mind and they want to work together. I think that can be.

But also understanding the Two Row Wampum with the settlers, that was made with mostly white people. And now we find that we live in a society out there where there are many people of many different colours. And if we go back to that settler ship, there was class division on that settler ship: there was the captain, there were his lieutenants, there were the deckhands, there were

indentured servants, and there were slaves stuffed in the back, stuffed in the bottom of those ships. So I think that the Two Row Wampum has to be inclusive

**Our responsibility is
to our people first and
to our community.**

of the other nations that are here. And I truly believe that, had our people known that there were slaves stuffed into the bottom of those ships, I truly believe that we probably never would have entered into those agreements knowing how they treat other humans. Because if we were to look and see those slaves, how could someone enter into one good mind with that?

To what extent do you find western philosophies of struggle – Marxism, anarchism, social democracy – to be useful to you? I’ve seen you identify capitalism as a central force to struggle against, in addition to colonialism. Does western analysis like Marxism help in understanding those forces? What are the limits of these philosophies for your struggle?

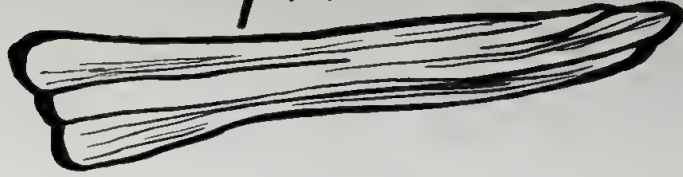
Giibwanisi: From my own perspective, I have to be open-minded to everything, to all sorts of struggles including those mentioned above.

But there are things that are useful and there are things that are not useful. I don’t subscribe to anarchism because I don’t believe in disorganization. I like some of the things that are said about Marxism, especially the scientific approach to understanding economics and political science. But at the same time, there are a lot of things that I do not agree with in Marxism. Marxists often omit two parts of the medicine wheel. Marxism focuses on a specific ideology which is the mental, and probably the physical, like taking physical action in revolution. But Marxists omit the emotional and the spiritual context of how we think and operate. ⑤

*Interview abridged and adapted from the journal
Alternate Routes.*

DRIFTWOOD

by KARA SIEVEWRIGHT

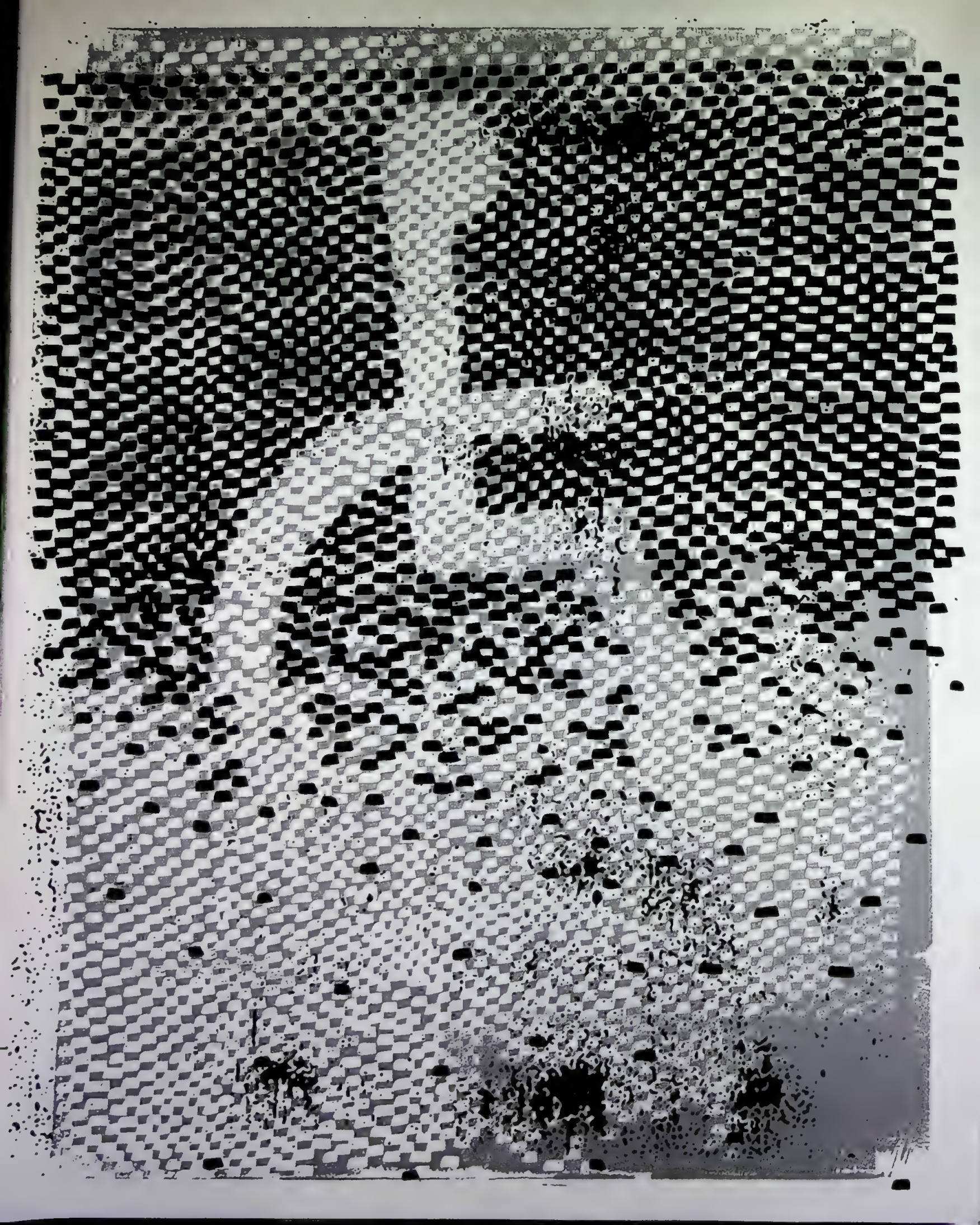






AND DRIFT FOR YEARS





Beyond the wheelchair

The International Symbol of Access (ISA), or wheelchair sign, is an emblem of the hard-won gains made by generations of disability activists. Yet, the wheelchair sign is also a mark of the constraints imposed on our very conceptions of accessibility, disability, and universality.

By Kelly Fritsch

Illustration by Lindsay Fisher

A few years ago, I tried to take a bus to a small town outside of Toronto. I checked to confirm that the bus I wanted offered accessible service, and when I arrived at the station I was relieved to see a bus with the International Symbol of Access (ISA) pull up in front of me. But when I asked the driver to let me use the lift to get on, he looked at me incredulously and said I couldn't use the lift unless I was seated and secured in a wheelchair. Although I couldn't climb the steep bus steps, I wasn't a wheelchair user. In that moment, as I stared at the ISA sign, I realized that I was both disabled and not disabled enough – or not disabled in the right way to access this accessible bus.

Having continually faced this kind of barrier to accessibility, I took a keen interest last September when the lieutenant-governor of Ontario, David Onley, launched an international design challenge entitled Reimagining Accessibility in an effort to redesign the ISA.

The ISA is the most common representation of disability and accessibility in the world. In opening the design competition, Onley noted that, despite its universal use, the ISA is an exclusionary symbol that narrows the diversity of disability and accessibility to the uniformity of a wheelchair. The current ISA suggests access is about accommodating wheelchairs through ramps, elevators, and electric door openers. Left out of this image of accessibility is the majority of disabled people for whom accessibility is less about ramps and more about sign language interpreters, scent-free environments, auditory announcements on public transit, and a host of other requirements.

Onley was right to highlight the limits of the wheelchair as the symbol of accessibility. But what his design challenge can't address is what it means to have a symbol of accessibility or disability at all – and how such an icon limits what kind of disability politics are even possible.

The rise of the wheelchair sign

Back in 1968, Rehabilitation International, a disability rights organization, held a design competition like Onley's to come up with a graphic representation of access. Remarkably, all entries submitted to the international competition were representations of wheelchairs or wheelchair users. Susanne Koefoed, a Danish graphic design student, won the competition with her design of a white outline of a wheelchair within a black square. Rehabilitation International's committee changed her design, humanizing the wheelchair by adding a head to Koefoed's design and placing the figure within a blue square. The sign was approved and promoted globally in 1969.

The influence of wheelchair users on this early conception of access arose from the postwar development of the wheelchair itself. In 1933, two mechanical engineers – Herbert Everest, who had become disabled in a mining accident, and Harry Jennings – made the first semi-portable, self-propelled, folding wheelchair out of lightweight metal aircraft tubing. In 1945, the Canadian government purchased over 200 wheelchairs to provide to war veterans. While ostensibly a story of a concerned government looking out for its veterans, the arrangement also had an economic logic. The Canadian government agreed to

purchase the new devices to get veterans out of hospitals and long-term care institutions and back into the labour force.

With the development of lightweight, portable wheelchairs and the later introduction of electric wheelchairs, the wheelchair became a tool for disability-based political action. In the

“Independent living was a revolutionary concept at the time.”

1960s, a group of radical quadriplegic students in Berkeley called the Rolling Quads used their electric wheelchairs to occupy space and demonstrate

against inadequate state services in California. At the time, Ed Roberts, a member of the Rolling Quads, said: “If they don’t see me as a human being, if they only see my equipment, I know that I can get whatever I want out of them.”

The success of these demonstrations eventually led to the founding of the Physically Disabled Students’ Program (PDSP) in 1970, an organization run by and for disabled people that repaired wheelchairs, provided personal assistants, and helped disabled students access funding. The PDSP was a precursor to both Berkeley’s Center for Independent Living (CIL) and the international independent living movement, and it played a key role in stimulating the disability rights movement across North America.

“[Independent living] was a revolutionary concept at the time,” Roberts later said. “Most people never thought of independence as a possibility when they thought of us. But we knew what we wanted, and we set up the CIL to provide the vision and resources to get people out into the community.”

“We secured the first curb cut in the country, at the corner of Bancroft and Telegraph Avenue [in Berkeley]. When we first talked to legislators about the issue, they said ‘Curb cuts, why do you need curb cuts? We never see people with disabilities out on the streets. Who is going to use them?’ They didn’t understand that their reasoning was circular. When curb cuts were put in, they discovered that access for people with disabilities benefits many others as well.”

Looking back, what activists must contend with is that while the wheelchair allowed some disabled people to live independent lives and attain employment with the support of the welfare state, the disability rights and independent living movements emerged alongside the rise of neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatization, and individualization. Thus, the independent living movement gained momentum at the same time that the government began denying funding to unionized positions in nursing homes and other institutions while trumpeting the cost-effectiveness of using flexible labourers as personal attendants.

This deregulation of the workplace brought significant changes to care providers’ safety and rights while governments and businesses promoted public-private partnerships in mental health, rehabilitative services, and various forms of outpatient

community services. As a result of these measures, government responsibilities have been downloaded onto municipalities, non-governmental organizations, grassroots organizations and charities, or individual families.

One of the biggest political challenges, then, is not that the ISA does not adequately represent the diversity of disability. Rather, the tougher challenge lies in the way in which the ISA, as a child of neoliberalism, marks disability and accessibility as a problem for some individuals instead of portraying accessibility as an issue for all.

The disabled and the normal

“Putting the access symbol on a door or a bathroom stall divides who is considered disabled from who is considered able-bodied,” says Toronto-based disability writer and activist Eliza Chandler. “People using wheelchairs are juxtaposed to everyone else. The image leaves no room for the complexity of disability, for the ways in which disability is context-dependent.”

By designating spaces that are accessible to wheelchair users in contrast to spaces that are not, the ISA splits the world between the disabled and those deemed normal. Such a division of space flies in the face of universal design and notions of collective access. In creating separate spaces, the ISA makes it seem as if the able-bodied do not require access and ignores the ways that most people move between levels of ability throughout their lives.

“Someone may get migraine headaches from fluorescent lighting – that limits the kind of spaces they can be in,” Chandler notes. “Or someone could break a leg, have particular needs during pregnancy, or simply have changing access needs as a result of growing older or experiencing a traumatic event. These are just a few examples of the ways in which people move in and out of needing different forms of access.” In place of this binary between the disabled and able-bodied, activists like Chandler ask us to think about disability in terms of the changing forms of embodiment and access that are part of the human condition itself.

When access is thought to be an issue for abnormal people, disability becomes an individual problem. As a result, we tend to ignore the ways in which disability involves broader social relations, including access to adequate health care and decent housing, loss of

The wheelchair became a tool for political action.

labour rights, and exposure to pollution. Slapping the wheelchair symbol on a bathroom stall reduces disability to an individual in a wheelchair rather than marking disability as fluid and contextual. “It is much easier to put up a sign than change social relations,” says Chandler.

Redesigning normal

Even recent grassroots attempts to redesign the ISA do not fully escape the neoliberal representation of disability as

an individualized problem. For example, the Accessible Icon Project in the U.S. redesigned the ISA as a more active icon, emphasizing an independent wheelchair user in motion. The redesign focuses on the mobility of the person using the wheelchair, in contrast to the immobile, static, and passive wheelchair user of the traditional ISA. By focusing on the abilities of the wheelchair user, emphasizing the motion of the individual, and situating the disabled person as the driver, the redesign seeks to “suggest the dynamic mobility of a chair user” and represent the user’s “active status of navigating the world.” This redesign of the ISA makes the person, not the wheelchair, the focus, suggesting that people are more than their disabilities.

Nevertheless, the design continues to highlight the individual rather than the social dimensions of disability and impairment. This more active icon has begun to appear across the U.S. and has replaced the older ISA in cities such as Austin, El Paso, New York, and Boston.

Should we be surprised that the Accessible Icon Project behind the design has recently paired up with corporate sponsors who relish the commercial potential of this upbeat take on disability? The disabled person of this redesign doesn’t need the welfare state to push her wheelchair. Instead, this upwardly

mobile subject wheels herself wherever neoliberalism will take her, corporate sponsors and all.

More recently, in November 2013, the City of Vancouver passed an adaptable housing bylaw that requires all new housing units built in Vancouver to include wider stairways, higher electrical outlets, main-floor bathrooms, and lever handles (rather than doorknobs). Such a bylaw imagines a diversity of people living in these homes. Rather than requiring a limited number of fully accessible units be built with every new development, the bylaw focuses on the small ways in which

all new developments can have the necessary infrastructure in place to make a home accessible or more affordably adaptable to a variety of people. While this bylaw is by no means a panacea for disabled people in Vancouver, it attempts to do something very different than the Accessible Icon Project or Onley’s redesign.

From this vantage point, it is not enough to redesign the ISA to be more inclusive of varying disabilities or to promote a more mobile wheelchair user. Rather, we must fight to eliminate the need to even have a symbol of access. How would the world look – for everyone – in light of a larger social project oriented toward universal design, collective access, and the recognition of a diverse range of embodiment? Disabled people don’t need a better sign; we need a better world. ⑥

“It’s much easier
to put up a sign
than to change
social relations.”

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Imagining Black Vancouver

In 2007 two Vancouver activists were inspired to create a Little Africa in East Vancouver. This is the story of that experiment in reclaiming past and present city space.

Words and photo montages by Naomi Moyer



What would a black community look like in Vancouver? Would it look like dinner at a friend's place, getting your hair done at Nu Nu's Hair salon, or a black history luncheon in East Vancouver? Let's be honest: Vancouver isn't known for being a chocolate city, and there's no outlying black community like Shelburne, N.S., or Ajax, ON, in sight. We have the annual Caribbean Days Festival, where hundreds of us come out to a North Vancouver park in July, but when the weekend is over, we disperse back into our integrated pockets around the Lower Mainland.

Born and raised in B.C., I know what it feels like to be the only black person in my school, on the bus, or in just about any public space. Even if you find two or three of us at the same place and time, we might lack solidarity and connection because we're each too busy trying to fit in. Eventually we may grow into being black

and proud, but we're never comfortable being "the other."

Lacking familial ties, I have constantly been in search of a black community. Then in 2005, I found some other people searching for that same sense of belonging and became involved with the Hogan's Alley

"Oppressed people need a little romance. It can create hope and starting points."

Memorial Project (HAMP), which was founded in 2002. HAMP was a group of predominantly self-identified black folks dedicated to keeping the black history of Vancouver alive and the present black community visible. As HAMP members, we got together to discuss both our own experiences being black and Vancouver's black community more broadly. We held

monthly meetings to explore ways to bring Vancouver's black history to light and to better connect with past residents of Vancouver's historic black community, Hogan's Alley.

So what was Hogan's Alley? It was literally just that, an alley, stretching from Union to Prior Streets, in the neighbourhood of Strathcona in East Vancouver. Park Lane (the formal name of the alley) and the surrounding area had a high concentration of black residents for the first six decades of the 20th century. Hogan's Alley was the only place one could find a black church, a central foundation for black folks living there at the time. There were also many black-owned restaurants, including several owned and staffed by black women. When performing in Vancouver, famous jazz musicians like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Nat King Cole made a point of visiting Vie's Chicken and Steak House, a



popular black-owned restaurant located at 209 Union St. in Hogan's Alley. Ike Turner and the Mills Brothers actually performed in Hogan's Alley at Harlem Nocturne, the city's only black-owned nightclub, founded by jazz trombonist Ernie King.

Hogan's Alley was a vibrant and supportive black community that unfortunately faced a lot of racial discrimination. Many residents were low-income, their homes were seen as blighted dwellings, and the nightlife was frowned upon. By 1970, most of Hogan's Alley had been bulldozed in order to

Let's be honest: Vancouver isn't known for being a chocolate city.

make way for the Georgia Viaduct. The viaduct is a massive overpass that connects Strathcona to downtown and is,

essentially, part of an unfinished freeway system that was otherwise successfully opposed through grassroots resistance, especially by residents of Chinatown. Canada has a long history of such racially motivated urban renewal projects, including the repeated demolitions of Calgary's Chinatowns and the displacement of residents of Africville in Halifax in the 1960s.

As HAMP members, we were determined to make the elusive history of Hogan's Alley more tangible. We went to the annual Black History Celebration luncheons where black families and community members came together, attended panel discussions, and spoke with relatives of Hogan's Alley residents. We collaborated with street artists and planted

a giant flower bed right on the bank of the Georgia Viaduct that read "Welcome to Hogan's Alley." We approached the

B.C. Archives in hopes of making black historical information more accessible to the public. With Afua Cooper, a historian, author, and dub poet, and David Hilliard, an ex-Black Panther, we held an event focusing on the gentrification of black communities across North America. We even snuck inside the last residence of the Hogan's Alley era, at 227 Union St., before it was demolished in 2007. It was three doors east of Vie's Chicken and Steak House, and we were lucky to take some pictures and grab some memorabilia before it was torn down.

The areas surrounding what used to be Hogan's Alley, like Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside (DTES), are currently undergoing serious gentrification themselves. But alongside these new waves of gentrification, Hogan's Alley is being commemorated. A café opened up on the corner of Union and Gore named Hogan's Alley Café. A Jimi Hendrix Shrine

Abraham's Metaphysical Books

Afro Hair Studio

Abyssinia Grocery



was established near the corner of Main and Union: Jimi Hendrix spent much of his childhood in Vancouver in the care of his grandmother, Nora Hendrix, who lived in

"There was nothing to indicate there had ever been a black community there."

Hogan's Alley and co-founded the African Methodist Episcopal Fountain Chapel.

In February of last year, the Vancouver Heritage Foundation installed a commemorative plaque for Hogan's Alley at Main and Union. "The plaque realizes one of HAMP's original goals," says Wayde Compton, an author and a co-founder of our group. The plaque publicly memorializes Vancouver's black community. "[Before,] there was nothing that would indicate to a person walking through the area that there had ever been a black community there at one time."

We're all familiar with Little Italys, Little Indias, Koreatowns, and Chinatowns, but where is the Little Africa of Vancouver? Thinking of a black community, according to former

HAMP member Adam Rudder, is almost whimsical. "Areas of town and monuments are all less interesting to me than the stories that weave together certain

kinds of experiences and thinking about the ways in which these experiences

challenge the way we think about things today," he says. "The whole process is romantic and in certain situations it's good. Oppressed people need a little romance; it can create hope and starting points."

If there was a Little Africa, what would it look like? In 2007, I and fellow HAMP member Karina Vernon had a vision of a black city block inspired by all the black businesses on Commercial Drive. The specific inspiration had come when Karina showed me the book *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings*. Opening it up, we turned to the colour insert and stared in amazement at the panoramic image of the 100 block on Hastings Street in the DTES. It was a block I walked by many times, a block that

either went unnoticed or was associated with poverty and crime, comparable to Hogan's Alley and so many other black communities across North America. This block lies across from the new Woodward's building and today would be unrecognizable. The arresting panorama presented parallels between community displacement of the past and present-day gentrification of the DTES.

How does one reclaim space, even if just in the imagination? How could we visualize a black community in Vancouver? Commercial Drive is a place we knew had a high concentration of black-owned businesses. Perhaps we could create a black-owned city block today. We got to it with a three-megapixel, point-and-shoot digital camera (which was very sophisticated at the time) and started snapping away. We walked into each black-owned business and asked if we could take an exterior photo for the project. Everyone was friendly and helpful. We tried to capture as many black passersby as possible in the process, and we soon we realized that it

Jamaican Pizza Jerk

Dejavu International Hair Studio

Nunu's Hair Salon



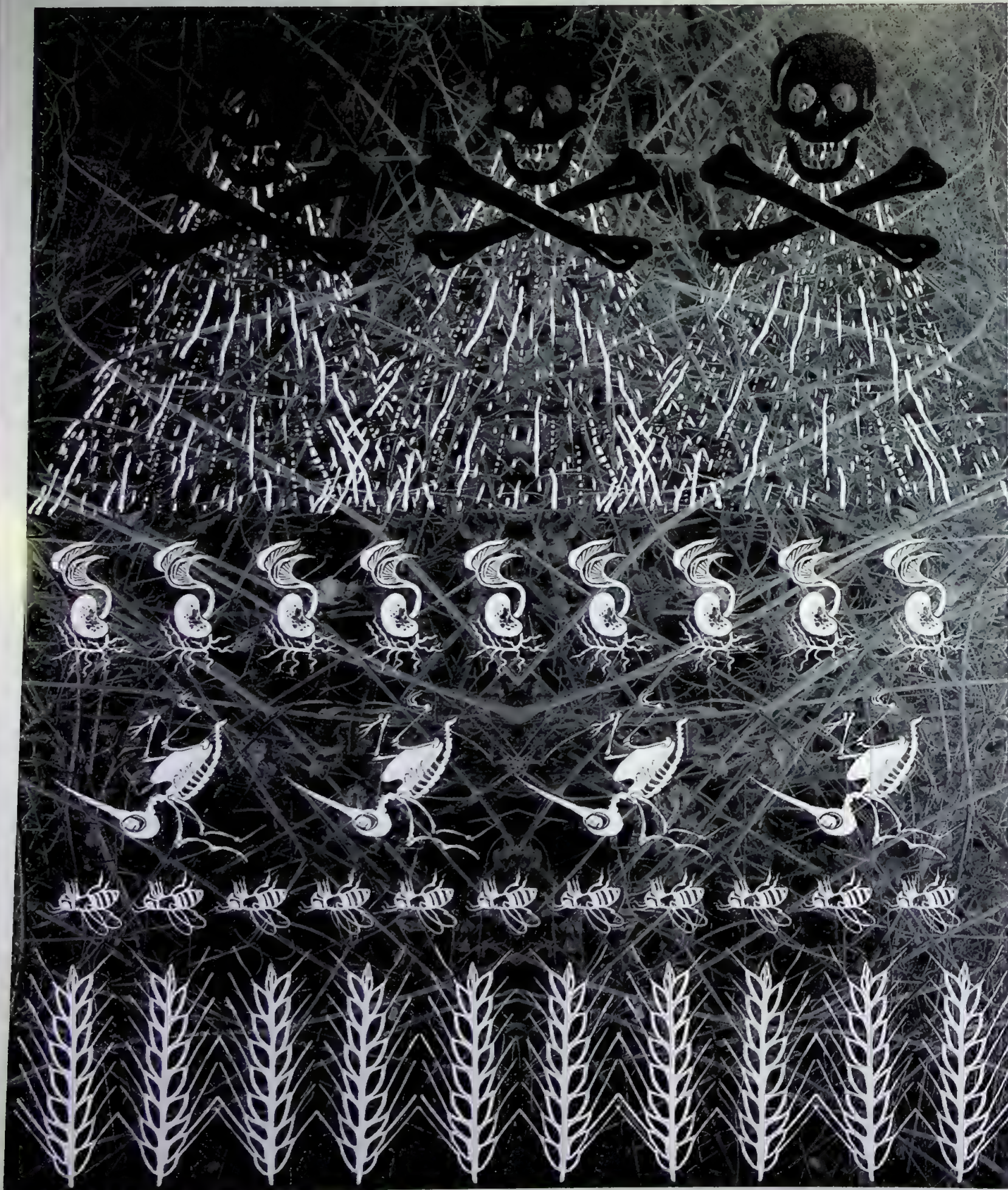
wasn't so hard to do – there were plenty of us walking around.

On Commercial, you can get plantains and patties; hear people speaking Patois, Bemba, and Somali; get your hair done; buy palm oil and a can of ackee; and dine on authentic Ethiopian cuisine. So perhaps this is what Little Africa might look like.

"The history here is particular, and there is much to celebrate and be proud of," says Compton. "I'd like us to resist the impulse to view ourselves only in the light of other histories that are more famous or influential." Even though the black population in Vancouver sits at a mere one per cent of residents, according to census data, we wanted to show that we are here, that we exist. We exist even if some people of African descent check the "other" box on the census form. We exist even if many folks don't identify as black because they identify as Haitian, Nigerian, Jamaican, Ghanaian, Trinidadian, or Somali. We wanted to show that an African diaspora has existed and still exists in Vancouver. Here, then, is your and our black city block. ⑤

Naomi Moyer





An Honest Man

By Matthew John Loewen

Illustrations by Xero

The townsfolk were all stunned and abuzz. Shaking their heads and trying to find words for what Old Farmer Jakob had done. Recounting the accumulation of community knowledge; spinning out old yarns; reliving memories; sifting for some reason, some motive, some sign.

Saying all the while, "But he was such an honest man!"

They knew that he came from overseas and that all he knew was digging holes.

The first two he dug were for his brothers two weeks after armistice. They were torn apart in a flash and a shower of soil when their plow overturned a live shell sleeping in the family fields.

With his young wife, Ana, he had left on the next boat for the land of opportunity.

Jakob had calculating eyes that could divine the machinery working below the surface of life's situations. His stubborn will stood firm in the face of hard truths. He was the kind of man who shouted to prove his confidence, but more often than not he was silent in thought.

Ana was a hale and hearty woman with clever hands that spun life's wool into workable thread. With energy and wit that knit together their new marriage, she was the kind of woman who sang often and clearly to anyone with ears to listen. She smiled because sometimes it was all she could do.

Their love was deep and warm and quiet.

The two had claimed a plot of dusty turf some decades past as part of a church settlement deal. They tore the soil while it slept, and come spring it awoke, batting a green eyelash. They mostly sold the tears on those lashes to the grocer, Herbias J. Corningstone, a man who insisted his middle initial be included at every mention. His twine was constantly unravelling so that he sputtered when he spoke and fretted with his fingers, but

he was always ready with a firm handshake and a fleet-footed quip from behind his big, black cash register.

Jakob and Ana's cornucopia spilled into baskets on market day, where the townsfolk advanced with hungry families at home.

Jakob and Ana's cracked lips rose in thin grins.

Their family swelled with children who loved their mother's bedtime stories. When she read, the words came alive from the big book that seemed to hold every story ever told. Chores with their hard-working father reddened their hands and levelled their heads. Sons and daughters both civil and roguish grew to be men, women, and more. Some took up school, some married, and they all moved away. All the while, the tractors gritted their bits and squinted their eyes ever forward, lugging leather, metal, and wood through the fragrant earth.

After the war, it all seemed like a song of hope and plenty. It was a time of experimentation and abundance. Business boomed. And farming changed fast along with family and town.

Jakob moved along with the times. He arranged his old equipment in their red-painted hospice and bought a big, new tractor, seeder, and thresher. He purchased different laboratory seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers – the works. They kept a few animals for winter meat, and Ana refused to give up her cherished garden, but Jakob set his calculator eyes on wheat and wheat alone. He had to. Other farmers had green dripping from their hands, stuffed into wallets and banks, and he wasn't about to be left behind.

Every morning Ana sang Jakob awake in tune with the coffee kettle in the kitchen. Sometimes, as he grumbled good-naturedly over his toast, she went out to fuel the tractor or fill the sprayer with the sweet-smelling, blue-green liquid that kept their crop clean. On those days, as she sang in the garden among

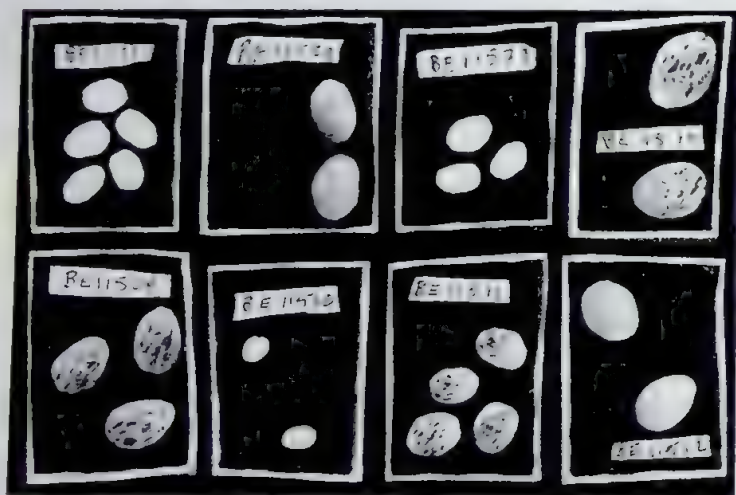
her stacks of purple and white carrots, her rows of crisp peas and piles of outcast dandelions, the saccharine aroma lingered and clung about her, inviting a quiet worry to knit her brow.

Now and again they went into town to meet with their financier.

The bank was as bright and hard as the grinning banker, who spoke to Jakob about global surplus, bilateral trade agreements, the wheat board, and agricultural subsidies. Beneath a trim toothbrush moustache, the banker's silver tongue danced and spun. As he spoke of ups and downs and flows and policies, Jakob stared out the window and silently tallied the bustle of town. Ana tried to smile through her disquiet.

Their plants pierced the sky and leaned with the weight of an ample harvest. But wheat prices dropped in this time of surplus, and hungry bank accounts gnawed at the townsfolk.

Like many other farmers in the flatlands, Jakob met with a company man and had his wheat shipped to the same place the money came from – Lord only knows where. He signed a document agreeing to send his crops off when the truck came,



no buts about it. He agreed to buy his seed from the company man. And chemicals, too. All under contract. He liked that. He felt catered to. Looked after.

Herbias J. Corningstone's country market went out of business, overrun by a stark food warehouse with well-lit aisles and special deals and fancy labels. They sold all manner of tools and clothing and foodstuffs at rock-bottom prices. No one really knew what came of the flighty Herbias J. He disappeared. Most suspected he just moved away of his own accord. Ana wasn't so sure.

Ana often went out to the fading old barn, thronged with nesting swallows, to sit with the cantankerous old iron ox that now rusted and filled with mice and spiders. Pondering, she looked down at her hands – hands traced in turquoise in the fading evening light.

And then one day, the banker gave them the news. Payments had begun to outstrip revenue. Like many family farmers, Jakob and Ana were digging a different hole now. A seed planted in this hole eats down to nothing – it doesn't sprout.

Day in, day out, they struggled. Tried to make the farm pay.

But soon enough, the company man phoned, speaking in the language of contract about crop projections and moneys overdue. Old Jakob scribbled numbers on bills and in ledgers. He scribbled on the mortgage papers, too, and the banker gathered them up in eager hands. Ana still sang her old songs in the garden, but her voice quavered in a faint and unfamiliar key.

The aging couple grew a plentiful harvest. But it grew short of targets. So they grew short of coin and short of food. Then they were short of health and short of time. But Old Ana still smiled. She smiled and swelled with hope and with cancer, singing softly to herself in her vibrant garden. She sang among the thick scarlet runner beans, flowers whirring with hummingbirds, rows of crisp cabbage heads, and a small forest of purple-crowned chives.

But her own vigour failed.

While his wife quietly ebbed away in a quilted room, Old Jakob toiled on. He toiled for her medicine, toiled for her food, and he toiled for her doctors. He worked his bones into the soil. The sprinklers wept. The hogs lamented. The weather vane twisted in the prairie wind. Jakob harvested teardrop kernels from acres of golden lashes.

And when Ana quietly slipped away, Jakob dug another hole as his children headed home.

After the funeral service and the hubbub of well-wishers and mourners, his children left once more to tend to their faraway lives. Jakob felt a numbness creeping in, and he paced about the empty house to chase it away. He stopped and stood for a long time at the bookshelf in the living room to look at the old photographs, to lose himself in the memories and wonder at the way everything had grown and moved and changed so fast.

He pulled out the old tome of fairy tales that was Ana's favourite, and the children's too. Tucking it under his arm, he walked out to the old, washed-out barn. He sat down again in the high metal seat atop the ruins of his tractor, the mice and swallows and spiders gathering all around.

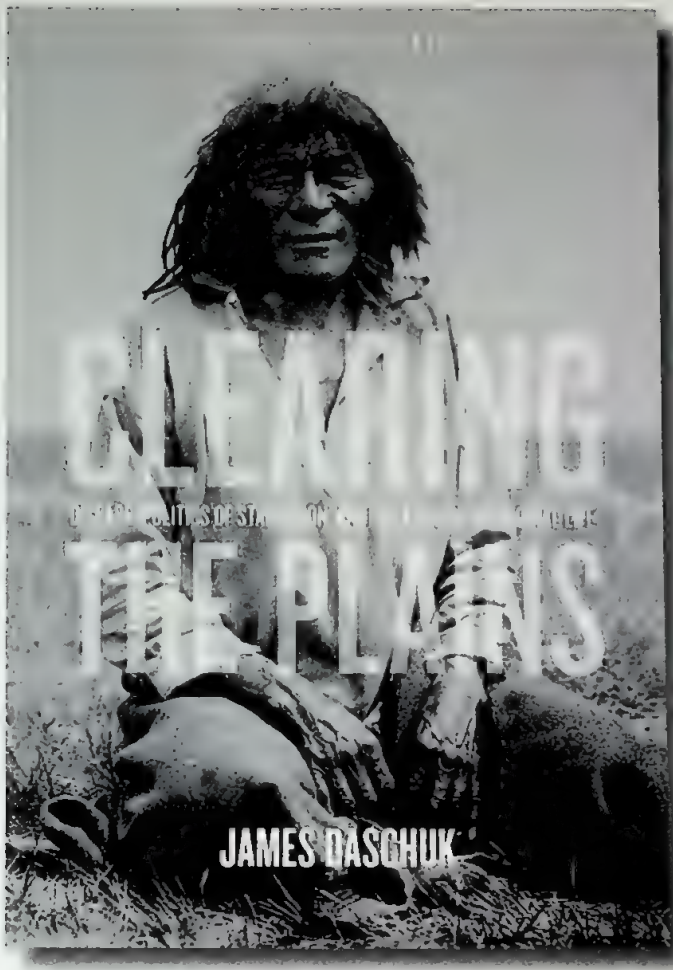
He opened the book to a marked page. And there he saw a picture of Snow White, pale as Ana in her deathly sleep, a poisoned apple tumbling from her outstretched palm. Something twisted, snapped inside him. He closed his eyes and fought the grief and guilt and rage that threatened to swallow him whole.

The banker phoned to offer his condolences, but also to remind him of debts owed. Old Jakob proved his modesty and resolved to accept his fate.

Well after the roosters crowed at sunrise, the company man and the grinning banker arrived. The suits wore their men well. They were two peas in a pod, with civil and unyielding briefcase hands. They wrinkled their noses at the pigpen and knocked on the door. Old Jakob invited them in for breakfast and business.

Mugs of bitter coffee clinked. Jakob swallowed and watched the suits do the same. They didn't notice the blue-green stain on Ana's fine white china. Jakob's thin lips shook. His eyes flared with doubt and triumph. The air in the room shifted and fled, and a cry of sorrow caught in his burning throat.

And so Old Jakob dug his final holes. **B**



Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life

By James Daschuk
University of Regina Press, 2013

Reviewed by Paul Burrows

In the context of a Canadian popular imagination still permeated by myths about heroic voyageurs, intrepid Mounties, and an inexorable yet ostensibly “peaceful” and “lawful” acquisition of other peoples’ lands, James Daschuk’s *Clearing the Plains* is a vital intervention. Described by historian Elizabeth A. Fenn as a “tour de force that dismantles and destroys the view that Canada has a special claim to to humanity in its treatment of Indigenous peoples,” Daschuk’s study of Indigenous health and disease on the Canadian Prairies draws on decades of research to recount Canada’s policies of forced starvation

and ethnic cleansing. More broadly, it’s a good introduction to the history of Canadian expansion into the northwest and the nature and evolution of Canadian Indian policy in the 19th century.

Research for *Clearing the Plains* began some 20 years ago as part of Daschuk’s doctoral program in history at the University of Manitoba under the supervision of D.N. Sprague.

A smug self-image dominates in much Canadian historical writing.

Sprague was himself a scholar of Canadian and Métis history, perhaps best known for his lengthy feud with Tom Flanagan over interpretations about Louis Riel, presumptions of government “benevolence,” and the causes of Métis dispossession in the

Red River valley. Like Sprague’s own work, *Canada and the Métis* (1988), *Clearing the Plains* finds little evidence of Dominion “benevolence” in its annexation of the Canadian northwest or in its post-Confederation dealings with First Nations.

However, Daschuk’s is also a work of environmental and epidemiological history. As such, he argues that human agency, greed, and colonial power are “only half of the story.” In his view, the field of biology is equally important to understanding Indigenous history, not just in present-day Canada but also throughout the hemisphere. Much of what follows is an attempt to strike a balance between these two sides of causation, with Daschuk see-sawing between a portrait of epidemic disease as an inexorable, objective, even

organic force, and a counter-portrait that emphasizes the social determinants and policy-induced nature of compromised immunity, disease outbreaks, and death.

The historical scope of *Clearing the Plains* is sweeping. The book opens with an assessment of pre-European health and well-being on the northern Great Plains, then concentrates on the impact of the

joins a growing body of historical work examining the social determinants of health and, in particular, the relationship between Indigenous health and Canadian policy.

Overall, Daschuk's book is important less for unearthing new and surprising historical facts than for expanding upon, reinterpreting, and publicizing them. For example,

one of the central theses of *Clearing the Plains* is that famine

heel, and force the Cree to capitulate to treaty terms. *Clearing the Plains* not only expands on such themes, bringing to light further evidence and examples, but its publication has made them accessible to a much wider public.

Daschuk's interpretive framework sheds the congratulatory and smug self-image that still dominates in much Canadian historical writing. He is unafraid, for example, to label the settler-colonial process in southern Saskatchewan "ethnic cleansing," and elsewhere he has described the foundation of modern Canada as resting upon the twin truths of "ethnic cleansing and genocide." Those wanting a crash course in Prairie colonial history would do well to read Daschuk's book alongside Sarah Carter's *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900* (University of Toronto Press, 1999). Both books are carefully empirical but rooted in a deep commitment to social justice. Together, they serve as excellent points of departure for further research into colonial policy in the Canadian Prairie provinces. **B**

Famine was a deliberate policy weapon used to coerce "unco-operative Indians" onto reserves and remove them from lands coveted by white settlers.

fur trade era and nascent European settlement, and ends with the post-Confederation treaty era and the "nadir of indigenous health" in the wake of the Northwest Resistance of 1885. Throughout the book, Daschuk emphasizes the relationships between Indigenous health, outbreaks of epidemic diseases, and environmental factors, as well as settlement expansion, settler ideology, and most crucially, Indian policy. In this regard, *Clearing the Plains*

was a deliberate policy weapon used to coerce "unco-operative Indians" onto reserves and remove them from lands coveted by white settlers. This isn't a revelation for anyone familiar with existing scholarship. In his influential 1983 article, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree," John Tobias persuasively demonstrated that starvation was a weapon used to impose the reservation system, bring "recalcitrant" leaders such as Big Bear to

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QUOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND



"Let us toast to animal pleasures, to escapism, to rain on the roof and instant coffee, to unemployment insurance and library cards."

HUNTER S. THOMPSON

"I do not think it an exaggeration to say that most of the energy of most of the people is being diverted into a system which destroys them."

JEANETTE WINTERSON

"The singularity of the encounter between the ecosystems of the Old World and the New in the past 500 years is hard to fathom. Never has there been a comparable environmental and human transition. The equivalent exchange of goods, flora, fauna, people, and microbes could only be repeated if there was an exchange of life forms between planets."

JAMES DASCHUK

"Two parents can't raise a child any more than one. You need a whole community ... The little nuclear family is a paradigm that just doesn't work. It doesn't work for white people or for black people. Why we are hanging onto it I don't know."

TONI MORRISON

"AIDS activists learned quickly that effective prevention cannot be based on shame and a refusal to comprehend; it requires collective efforts at honest discussion, a realism about desire and a respect for pleasure."

MICHAEL WARNER

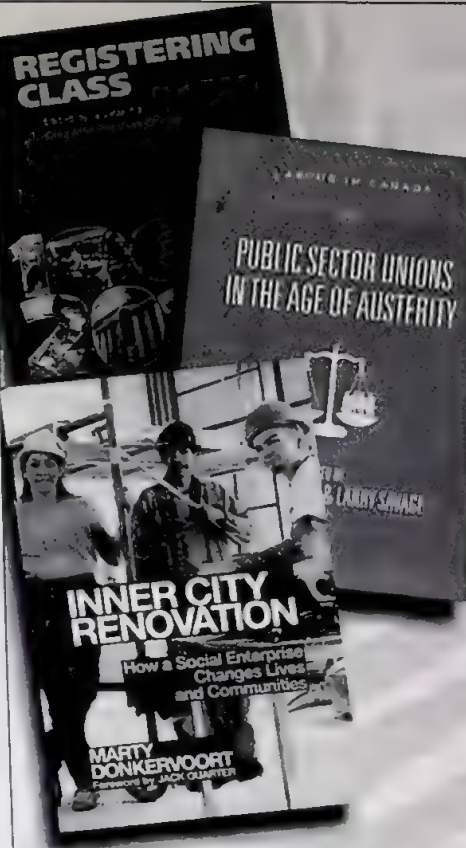
"This is why I work against the idea that emotions actually ground you somewhere in true justiceland. Emotion doesn't produce clarity but destabilizes you, messes you up, and makes you epistemologically incoherent ... you feel a lot of different kinds of things, and you make the sense of it all that you can."

LAUREN BERLANT

WRITERS' BLOC



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by Stephanie McMillan



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SUSTAINER PROFILE #25:

Diana Ralph



Diana Ralph lived in Saskatchewan from 1970 to 1988 and co-founded several social justice organizations in the province, including a welfare rights group (that co-wrote a theme issue for Briarpatch in 1988) and solidarity groups with Métis and First Nations communities opposed to uranium mining and clear-cutting (leading to another Briarpatch theme issue). A retired professor of social work, she now works as a psychotherapist in Ottawa and has recently begun a screenplay focused on climate change. She is a founder of Independent Jewish Voices Canada and the author of two books. She misses Saskatchewan!

Why did you help found Independent Jewish Voices?

I wanted to create a national organization that could unite Jews of conscience, effectively challenge the uncritically pro-Israel narrative, and stand in solidarity both with Palestinians and all those who get attacked as anti-Semitic for daring to support them.

What do you miss most about Saskatchewan?

The wonderfully warm, political, and courageous people. The First Nations, Métis, Ukrainian, francophone, Mennonite, farming, and folk cultures that weave such a unique and vibrant Saskatchewan tapestry. The varied land: grasslands, the northern Shield, the Qu'Appelle Valley. Believe it or not, I even miss Saskatchewan winters, which make us so tough, resilient, and co-operative.

What is your greatest extravagance?

My love for my wife, our children, and our five grandchildren.

What would be your personal motto?

Passionately go for love, justice, wisdom, and hope.

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The trouble with twitter

Protesting Twitter's protest value

By Nicole Shukin



With activists as diverse as Chinese artist Ai Weiwei and Mi'kmaq lawyer Pam Palmater mobilizing social change on Twitter, it's no surprise that tweeting has acquired a revolutionary sheen, albeit tarnished by Twitter's facilitation of country-specific censorship of tweets in 2012. Since emerging in 2006, Twitter has become a tactical tool of popular uprisings against repressive regimes (Arab Spring), against capitalist greed (Occupy Wall Street), and against the settler-colonial state (Idle No More). It promises to turn everyone into a just-in-time social commentator who relays events as they unfold on the ground, subverting the authoritative version relayed by the mainstream media. In the face of such promise, it might seem pesky to pick trouble with Twitter. But for two reasons, I protest the idea of Twitter's protest value.

The first concerns the image of a social network ecology that has been cultivated by the Twitter empire. The ruling conceit of the Twitterverse – which boasted 500 million registered users in 2012 – is the avian ecology of birdsong. The billions of tweets sent by humans on a range of hardware devices are likened to the short, sweet, and, above all, spontaneous memes emitted from the feather-breasted. In likening technologically mediated, long-distance human talk to the innocent ecology of birdsong, Twitter performs a magic trick with public perception, disappearing the material costs and conditions of tweeting. Environmental NGOs with Twitter accounts perhaps most paradoxically buy into the illusion that social networking transcends resource extraction.

Along with tweeting, the masterful rhetoric of the ethernet, cloud computing, and the blogosphere encourages the popular belief that digital communication is an immaterial transaction of bodiless data. Even in the 20th century, telecommunication seemed like magic; the electrical cables making it possible vanished beneath the appearance of spontaneous connection. In our wireless times, the material conditions of human connectivity are even more easily occulted. Seemingly immaterial data appears to volley as benignly as birdsong between members of the Twitterverse.

Against the illusion of the airy tweet, it's vital to recall that massive electricity-sucking data storage centres and server farms underpin virtual networks and that, like industrial factories, these farms are often strategically located next to cheap sources of available energy (coal, hydroelectric). Ironically, tweeting depends upon the energy regimes that are often the tweets'

objects of protest. Yet there's been little scrutiny by Twitter's users of the ecological conditions of digital communication.

Some may recall a 2001 campaign mobilized by a group of Belgian NGOs under the banner "No blood on my mobile! Stop the plundering of Congo!" The campaign drew attention to the "cost of a call" by linking mobile phone companies like Nokia to the illegal mining of coltan in the eastern Congo, which in turn was implicated in the country's devastating civil war and the plundering of its environment. Could a similar investigation of the socio-ecological cost of social media be initiated by Twitter activists? Or is tweeting perhaps too invested in a fantasy of free, unlimited communication to serve as the platform for such a discussion?

The second reason for protesting Twitter's protest value concerns its enmeshment in a larger political economy: the modes of production and social relationships of capitalism. In the history of modern capitalism, labour protests often involved resistance to the pace of production. Think of the sit-down strikes deployed by workers in Fordist factories to protest speed-ups on the assembly line. If the continuous speeding up of production and consumption is one of the hallmarks of a market economy (Slow Movements are a response to this), doesn't the love of high-speed communication suggest that social networking is more bound up in capitalist logics than we may like to admit?

Fordist modes of production have now been outstripped by modes of flexible, just-in-time production (Toyotism) in which commodities are "instantly" assembled on demand, rather than being supplied from a bulky stockpile. Not coincidentally, human social life has likewise sped up as technological platforms like Twitter facilitate just-in-time communication. The economy and speed of the 140-character tweet has made it a tool of choice for activists, particularly those navigating potentially deadly encounters with the police on a street level. Yet the instantaneity of tweeting is also where social networking most conforms to the pace of capitalist production. The very social lives of individuals and movements risk replicating the values of the dominant market economy even as they agitate for change.

It's always worth asking how the pace and means of new modes of communication potentially contradict their promised, liberating ends. Human tweeting for social change is only liberating if it isn't at the expense of the birds – that is, at the cost of the lively, non-human social ecologies that it takes as its model. ❷

**Twitter performs
a magic trick with
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